

CREATING *OUR CLASS STORY*:
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY INTO A MAINSTREAM GRADE ONE TEACHER'S
JOURNEY WITH EAL STUDENTS

by

Katherine Devlin

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum Teaching and Learning

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright © 2012 by Katherine Devlin

ABSTRACT

Diverse cultures continue to intersect on the school landscape in Manitoba. This autobiographical narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) documents 4 years of my experience as a Grade 1 elementary teacher working with an increasing number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. Between 2008 and 2011, I invited each class of students to engage in a collaborative writing project entitled *Our Class Story* where they shared their personal journeys to Grade 1. Drawing upon my field notes, journal entries, previous writings, and photographs, I tell four separate stories of my experience as this class project evolved over time with different groups of students. I then explore how working on *Our Class Story* shifted my teaching practice and beliefs about teaching EAL Early Years Learners.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people who contributed their expertise, encouragement, and support for this enterprise which made this thesis possible. Without them I would have never reached the end of such an enriching and exhilarating journey.

I would like to thank Dr. Yi Li. You have shown me a place where stories and research intersect. I will forever look at stories in new ways as I attempt to understand and discover new purpose within the storied landscape of my experience. Thank you for your consistent inspiration and guidance throughout the entire writing process. I would also like to acknowledge the support of my committee members Dr. Janice Huber and Dr. Wayne Serebrin for their insight and feedback. Our conversations reinforced various ideas and challenged me to think broadly and from many perspectives.

When I began this process my extended family did not know that they too had enrolled in the Master of Education program. While working on this thesis my family grew by one when Charlie arrived, making us a family of three. With the support and encouragement from my extended family this thesis became a reality, even with a newborn in the family.

To my husband Shane I especially want to express my gratitude. It feels satisfying to finally celebrate the end of this journey together and I look forward to new beginnings that await. Thank you for your patience when I was too exhausted for words and for making our lives manageable. To my fur babies, the ones who started this

journey with me, Balls and Keeters, and to the ones who saw it to completion, Gavado and Koschka. Your purrs of encouragement and loyalty did not go unnoticed.

A special thank you to Anne. Because of you I reached the finish line. You asked the right questions to keep me focused. You edited numerous drafts. You ensured that I had the nourishment my body needed to carry on. And you loved my son Charlie as though he was your own grandchild. For these reasons I will be forever grateful.

To Shelly, thanks for listening, motivating me to carry on, and supporting me both on my classroom landscape during the inception of this project, and throughout writing process. Thank you for lending an ear and opening your heart as I shared my ideas and relived *Our Class Story* one more time.

To my students, past and present, thank you for participating so enthusiastically in this project and for providing me with so many opportunities to reflect on my practice. To my colleagues, thank you for taking an interest in my adventures and for joining me on this journey. Our conversations challenged me to look at my practice through a different lens.

But, most importantly, thank you to my Altona instructor Rachael for extending the invitation that started it all.

To Anne

I met you as my mentor.

I was lucky to be your colleague across the hall.

But forever my friend,

Without you this story would have never been told.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Narrative Beginnings	1
My First Encounter with an EAL Student	2
I Had EAL Students in My Classroom, But	4
Trial and Error: I Did My Best	5
A Lesson Never Forgotten.....	6
Becoming a Community of Learners	9
Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone	12
The Invitation	16
Coming to the Research: Our Class Story	17
The Research Puzzle.....	18
Significance of the Research.....	18
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	21
A Picture of Changing Early Years Classrooms in Manitoba	21
Instruction of EAL Learners in a Mainstream Early Years Classroom: How Does Learning Take Place?	22
The EAL Early Years Learner	25
The Teacher Experience	28
CHAPTER THREE: NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	35
How I Arrived at Narrative Inquiry as a Research Methodology	35
Narrative Inquiry as a Research Methodology	38
Awakening to the Rhythms of Narrative Inquiry	42
Being in the Field: Living and Telling Our Class Stories	43
Composing Field Texts: Documenting My Experiences.....	44
Composing Research Text: Inquiring into My Experiences	48
Ethical Considerations in Narrative Inquiry	51
CHAPTER 4: JOURNEYING THROUGH 4 YEARS OF OUR CLASS STORY.....	53
Teaching Journal One: Meeting a Deadline! May 2008–June 2008	55
Teaching Journal Two: Broadening the Experience September 2008–January 2009	64
Teaching Journal Three: Living With/in Tensions November 2009–March 2010.....	86
Journal Four: Forging New Paths September 2010–June 2011	99
Reflections on My Teaching Practice over the Past 4 Years	121
CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVE CONCLUSIONS.....	126
EPILOGUE.....	133
REFERENCES	134

PROLOGUE

This journey began by chance and ended with purpose. In the spring of 2008 I decided to return to university to work on my second post-baccalaureate in Education. I was excited about my return to university, but I wanted to find a course which would help me ease back into the intensive schedule of spring session. The course that caught my eye was EDUB 5220 Language Academics and Literacy. It was held in Altona, Manitoba. As a Grade 1 teacher, I knew a lot about reading, writing, and literacy skills for Early Years students. So, I signed up thinking “what an easy way to start!”

Wow! Was I surprised when the first reading assignment arrived. The course I actually signed up for was about a specific group of English as an Additional Language (EAL) Learners referred to as Literacy Academics and Language (LAL) students. I later came to learn the Manitoba government defined LAL as “learners in the Middle and Senior Year who have significantly interrupted, limited, or no school experience” (Manitoba Education, 2011, pp. 1–4). It was a completely different course topic than my expected course of teaching literacy skills to young children. I had never heard of LAL students prior to this course, nor did I have any information about how to teach EAL students in the Early Years. This course became the first step in my journey into understanding how I could meet the needs of EAL students in my classroom and school.

Looking back to the spring of 2008 I realize as an elementary teacher I did not have LAL students in my classroom, however, that year I did have nine EAL students who were at various stages in their English development. It was during the first class, while we were learning about EAL students and their developmental needs, that I became aware of the gap in my professional knowledge. The content was not specific to my classroom setting but for the first time I sat among colleagues who shared a similar situation and the accompanying struggle to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classes. I was hooked. I desperately needed the focus and material which this course provided. It was one of the most meaningful and relevant courses I had taken in my academic studies. After I completed the course I focused 80% of my course work in English as an Additional Language studies. Once I completed my post-baccalaureate, I entered the Master's program focusing my research on Second Language Acquisition. What follows is the story of my journey into understanding how I could support and teach young EAL students in my Early Years classroom.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Narrative Beginnings

Over my relatively short teaching career of 12 years, I can look back and see changes in how I teach and think about children learning English as an Additional Language. For English speaking students, I know I have made a difference. For others, you could say I am young, energetic, and passionate about teaching. Reflecting back, I can see how much I have learned about teaching EAL students. These reflections have guided me and improved my practice. I often ask myself as a teacher: Why am I teaching this? Why am I having students engage in this task and what purpose will this serve?

As I pursued post graduate studies, I asked myself these same questions: Why am I sitting here and writing? How will it help students at school? How will it support my professional growth as an educator? Is this a story worthy of being shared? The obvious answer was yes because I continued to write! If I did not believe in the work I did, I would not have taken the time to sit at a computer and share my stories. What I do know is teachers are looking for information, strategies, and knowledge about how to work with English speaking and EAL students in their classrooms. Since the beginning of my teaching career, I have witnessed an increase in the number of students who do not speak English as their first language in my classroom, growing from one or two students 9 years ago to anywhere between seven and twelve students at the start of the year. Through conversations with other teachers, I have discovered that I am not alone. Sharing stories with other teachers about our successes and effective strategies is part of

our daily practice as educators. My hope in sharing this journey is that I may reach out to other teachers who may feel comforted that they are not alone, who may find an idea or strategy that helps them, or who may even recognize that they are making a difference.

My First Encounter with an EAL Student.

I was standing in my very first classroom during the summer of 2000. I remember looking around and thinking, “Wow, do I ever have a lot of work to do!” I spent my whole summer preparing for the students I would teach in the fall. It was a multi-age program with students in Grades 1, 2, and 3. I remember meeting with the former classroom teacher. She shared about the students, their personalities and the teaching styles she employed in her classroom. This group of students sounded wonderful and I could not wait to begin working with them.

One of our regular routines introduced in the fall was writing in our Weekend News Journals on Monday mornings. The students recorded the highlights and important news they had to share with their friends while I moved from table to table talking to students about their weekends. I learned a lot about the students as I visited with each of them. Reflecting back, I can remember my first EAL student who taught me about Saturday school one Monday morning. Through our conversation I learned that for a fee children could register and attend classes on Saturdays in their first language. Parents registered their children in hope that they would continue to speak, read, and write in their first

language. When the class gathered to share our weekend news, the student asked to pass and never shared the story of Saturday school. I never thought about it, until now. (Story of Remembered Experiences, Written on May 20, 2011)

Looking back on this moment over 11 years later, I see many relevant issues and the importance of that moment, but at the time it completely escaped me. I can see how easily I missed the opportunity to invite the child's life experience into the classroom. I probably missed many others as it was my first full year of teaching. I was simultaneously learning to manage the many roles of a teacher, and learning the "rules" of a new school while planning and teaching curricula to a multi-age class of Grade 1, 2, and 3 students. This program targeted students who were independent learners, asked for high parental involvement, and promised to deliver an activity-based program with a lot of hands-on learning. Although the focus was heavily on the students' individual needs, their personal backgrounds and languages spoken in the home were not part of the entrance questionnaire or something parents openly shared.

I believe this experience was likely the first time in my career that I had encountered a child learning English as an additional language. I did not acknowledge the EAL students' needs as different from the other children in the class. Today, when I reflect back on that moment, I know I missed an opportunity to connect with a student. I wish I would have asked more about what was learned at Saturday school and extended an invitation to share aspects of his/her experiences and language in the classroom.

I Had EAL Students in My Classroom, But . . .

Two years later, I began teaching at a different school in the same neighborhood. The new school was only 5 blocks away but was surrounded by many large apartment blocks. In time, I discovered the apartment blocks created a different community setting. Although families of both schools lived within walking distance of each other, their needs and family situations were very different. At my new school there was greater cultural and linguistic diversity and more transience. Many of the families who lived in the surrounding apartment blocks were newcomers. The majority of families had immigrated to Canada by choice. These families had chosen to settle in Winnipeg because they had friends or family nearby, they were graduate students at the university, they had fled unsafe living conditions, or they were searching for a better life for their children. Over time the school received fewer refugee students, but occasionally a family arrived as refugees. The commonality between both schools was that parents wanted to see their children happy, learning, and experiencing success at school.

In June 2002 I met with the previous teacher to learn about the students I would be teaching that fall. We talked at length about the students, their strengths, their needs, and backgrounds. We conversed about the different countries the children had lived in and the different languages they spoke. I learned that it was a particularly busy group of young children, but I approached the year with energy and determination. Looking back, I realize this was the first year I acknowledged that there were EAL students in my classroom. However, I did not change my programming or differentiate my instruction in

any way. I did not know what to do. There was nothing in my personal experience, university studies, or short teaching experience which prepared me for what was to come. I simply survived the year.

This was the year I hit rock bottom. I questioned why I even became a teacher. I finally understood how teachers ended up on stress leave no longer able to teach. I was unprepared for the issues that surfaced, and so was the school. There were 19 students in the room and at the end of the first day I walked into the administrator's office and expressed a huge concern that all of these children together was a recipe for disaster. And it was. Looking back now, I remember that several students had arrived as refugees and had seen the horrors of war, fleeing through the night to arrive in refugee camps. This presented a whole new set of emotional needs and I had no idea how to support the children. The school lacked the resources and knowledge to know what steps I needed to take.

Trial and Error: I Did My Best

I was coming to know the children. In the staff room I began sharing the stories. I shared these stories because I was trying to piece together what I knew about the families new to the school. Little bits of life experience were slowly being shared by students through drawings, and sometimes from their English speaking peers. I had no in-servicing or knowledge about how to program for EAL students. The approach I took, like many of my colleagues, was: don't push them, let them speak when they are ready,

and just let them embrace life in their new classroom. I tried to create a classroom environment that was accepting and safe. As for their academics, I helped the EAL students at every opportunity so they would be able to complete the same work as their peers. Pulling students out of the classroom for complementary instruction was almost forbidden and students were left to submerge themselves in the overwhelming experience of a Canadian classroom.

That was the year I first taught refugee students. I learned there was a big difference between children who had immigrated to Canada and those who had arrived as refugees. I learned a lot about political tensions in other countries, ways of protecting food, and the resiliency of children. Although I know I had the best of intentions, looking back at some of the choices and decisions I made as an educator at that time fills me with regret. I did not have the information, knowledge, or supports which guide me today.

A Lesson Never Forgotten

My first year of teaching in this new school was challenging. I realize now I never sat and spoke to students about their lives outside of school or what life was like before arriving in our classroom. As a class, we worked to understand the needs of each other. At the beginning of the year some students carried their lunches to gym and music, others hid under tables as emergency vehicles with sirens passed by the windows, and still others hid from our community police officer. Despite all our challenges, by the end of the year the students seemed to

learn the culture of our school. They seemed to start to trust each other and to figure out how to work together as a community of learners. Together we learned that a police officer in the school was normal and not something to fear, lunches were safe with me in the classroom, and sirens passing by our windows were normal.

As the year came to a close our family picnic was planned. Along with the food, bouncers, and carnival games, the committee who planned the event invited our community police officer, our local fire hall, and to my horror, the Canadian military to set up displays and vehicles. I was furious. I understood the police cruiser and the fire truck being driven onto our playground for children to see. I could not convince my colleagues that driving a tank onto the playground would be detrimental to the progress of the EAL students. I lost the argument and the tank arrived. Many students throughout the building were scared and confused. Many newcomer families did not show up at school; the ones who did come were upset and wanted to know what had happened. I did my best to explain that the military in Canada was not to be feared.

During morning recess I talked with other teachers and shared the students' fears with my principal, who was surprised. After all, who wouldn't want to climb on a tank and see inside? Later that day, the principal came to my classroom door and proposed a solution. Behind the principal stood four members of our Canadian Military wearing their green camouflage uniforms.

They had been asked to come and talk to some of our more nervous (refugee) students. Several students were called to the door and led out of the building onto the playground. This was the solution. I watched the students walk down the hallway, quiet and not saying a word. I could only wonder what was going through their minds. In the end, the students returned to the classroom and shared with their friends how the soldiers were really nice and helped them climb on the tank and even gave them candy. Their fears seemed calmed and their families came to the family picnic. (Story of Remembered Experiences, Written on August 1, 2011)

I will never forget the stories that unfolded during that week. I learned how fragile refugee families could be, even when I saw them as being resilient. I understood how events were absorbed differently depending upon background and life experiences. The presence of a tank did not create the same tension and emotional response for me as a Canadian as it did for young students who had experienced the horrors of war. As a teacher, this experience showed me I needed to learn more about the backgrounds of each student. I thought by listening and extending compassion and understanding it was possible to learn about each student and how they arrived in my classroom and the journey that brought them there.

There were many lessons I learned from the refugee students I worked with that year. I came to understand that I would never be able to walk in students' shoes or completely see the world through their eyes. However, as a teacher of students from

many different cultures and life experiences, I needed to try and wear the lenses of students and to imagine how different, unusual, or bizarre schools and new experiences might seem to newcomer families. Teaching is busy. There is never enough time. But I have learned that I need to carve out time to talk and share stories of life experiences with students.

That year, I learned to accept students who carried their lunches with them to every class, to allow students the security of hiding under the table every time an emergency vehicle passed by our classroom window, and to accept the many different ways students approached learning. I tried everything during that first year at my new school. I listened to everyone who had an idea and gave it a try. At the end of May, a good teacher friend talked with me about how I could help the students become a community of learners. As we talked I realized that until children felt comfortable playing together they might struggle to work and learn together.

Becoming a Community of Learners

I tried everything to establish a sense of community during this first year. I valued classroom communities where children felt a part of learning and were accepted into a space where their ideas, views, and experiences were welcomed and shared. That year was particularly challenging for me. I was dealing with many issues of war-affected children, but I had no idea until years later how deeply these kinds of issues and events could impact the children's lives. I never did reach the point where as a teacher I stepped

back and watched the students and thought, “they have connected. They are a community of learners.” Instead I kept trying different strategies and ideas until the end of the school year.

In June 2003, I worked with students on playing together. I had permission from parents to video tape events in the classroom and with the support of the administrator I began to video tape the students playing in the room. We stopped every 20 minutes and watched ourselves playing. The children seemed to be fascinated by watching themselves on the television. We talked about what we were doing well and what we needed to do to play better. We made lists of things everyone needed to start doing and lists of what we needed to stop doing. Then we played some more. Through our conversations, I realized how unaware the students were of their actions and interactions with each other. Our conversations were powerful; students seemed to see themselves and their peers in new ways. Two weeks later, they appeared to be more of a community of learners than they had ever been. My only regret was to have not spent time building friendships, understanding, and classroom community earlier in the year as this was the last month of school. I carried this lesson with me every year after that, spending classroom time on lessons which encouraged students to interact with each other and which provided opportunities for students to share about themselves. I took the time to watch how they played together and I supported each student as they learned how to interact with a large group of peers in a classroom setting.

As a result, I have stayed at the same school for over 9 years; I have become a part of the school community and I have learned a great deal about the children who walk through the halls. I can see how the lessons I learned in my first year of teaching there have remained with me and how I have grown into new ways of thinking. I have learned that all families have their own personal stories which have led them to our school. Although some of the experiences and places they have come from are similar to other families, no two stories are the same. Supports that are needed for one family are not required for another. I have learned to never assume anything about a family until I know them. Refugee and immigrant families may seem resilient and strong, but they can also portray a strong front, even when they encounter immense challenges and difficulties settling into their new home in Canada.

At the end of the 2002–2003 school year I was left with a lot to consider about how to approach the year ahead with a new group of students. I knew it was important to build a stronger connection with the students I was teaching. I began the 2003–2004 school year with taking time to establish a classroom community where everyone could connect and belong. I started out with small initiatives and strategies for building community and helping students play together and then work together. I was able to provide an invitation to students to share about themselves through the “Star of the Week.” Since then, what began as students taking turns being the Star of the Week has grown into something much bigger. In the past 4 years, I have taken time to listen and to help students record their stories and memorable moments from their lives. These stories

were like strings of a web that wove themselves together to create a secure net that had become the landscape of our classroom. As each year passed and students moved on, their shared stories moved with them and our web grew to slowly encompass the whole school. *Our Class Story* has always existed; I have just learned to pay more attention to the lives of students and to make space for their stories within our shared classroom walls.

Looking back through my university studies and teaching experiences, I can see the structure which has shaped my teaching career for the past 4 years. The LAL course in Altona in the spring of 2008 changed me in many different ways. I began to understand and see EAL students through a new lens. I stepped out of my comfort zone for a brief moment in time; I became lost in rural Manitoba, all the while discovering new strategies to help students learn. I began to realize that I was not alone struggling to teach linguistically and culturally diverse learners.

Stepping Out of My Comfort Zone

In many of our EAL courses, we were encouraged to get uncomfortable, travel outside of our normal routines, and experience a different culture or language. I was never quite brave enough. Perhaps this story would shed some light on how sheltered and secure I had felt in my surroundings.

The LAL course in Altona was an hour and a half drive from my home in Winnipeg. I was so nervous about making the trip. I had never driven on the

highway by myself before. I had this horrible fear I would miss my turn-off and be 20 kilometers down the road before I could turn around. I know this may sound silly, but the thought of driving on the highway created a tightness in my chest that could only be explained as sheer panic. I ended up riding out to the first class with the instructor. Once I knew where I was going, the trip was manageable with slight moments of fear the night before I made the drive for subsequent classes.

The world outside Winnipeg was foreign to me. I had travelled many times with my family on road trips. However, we never stopped or stayed in any farming communities. Life in rural Manitoba was quite unfamiliar to me. I learned Co-Op was not just a gas station, as it was in the city; it had clothing and groceries too. My new friends I made in the course found my lack of rural knowledge amusing! I learned new words like windrows, which were the lines of mowed hay left in a field. As much as I dreaded the trip each week, I enjoyed what I was learning and my new friends.

During one of our classes, as a group we decided to move our class to the town of Winkler. Again, my anxiety rose as I now needed to navigate my way to another new location in rural Manitoba. I thought, "I can do this." If the students I taught could fly half way around the world and move to a country where they did not speak the language, and yet they made friends and began a new life, I

could drive an extra half hour and find Winkler, Manitoba. After all, it did have a Tim Hortons and I could reward my bravery with an Iced Cappuccino!

I was prepared. The night before I looked up the school where we were meeting. I Googled it and printed out my map. The following morning I left with an extra hour to spare. About 2 hours later, I phoned my husband on the verge of tears and told him I did not think I was in Canada anymore. He laughed and tried to calm me down. He asked if I could see any signs. In my moment of thinking “I am going to be lost forever” all I could see was the name of a town that was 33 letters long with a lot of c’s and z’s in it. I could not read it. He reassured me that I was still in Canada, after all I had not passed any border crossings. With his encouragement, I turned my truck around and found the nearest people to ask for directions.

I turned at the first road off the highway and stopped at a familiar Winnipeg sight, a garage sale. I composed myself, got out of the truck, and approached two ladies who were sitting in lawn chairs. I told them I was lost and the name of the school I was looking for. One of the ladies raised both her hands and said something about not speaking English while the other lady tried to sell me items from their garage sale. I really did feel like I had left Canada for a moment and wondered what I would do next when a boy who was about 14 years old appeared. I showed him my map and pointed to the school. He kept looking at it and shaking his head no. I pointed to the school again. He looked at me and

pointed across the field from the house. In the distance was a brand new school. I thanked him and followed the road until I came upon the school. I parked my truck outside, called my husband to tell him about my encounter with the German family, and that I had safely arrived.

I managed to pull myself together, wipe away my tears, gather my belongings, and enter the school. I was about 5 minutes late. Not bad, considering my ordeal. When I sat down, the instructor came over and asked me how I had made out on my own. I told her and managed to hold back the tears. She laughed and told me how she almost called to offer me a ride but thought I would manage. My colleague beside me looked at the map and passed it around to many people who lived in the town of Winkler. As it turned out, even Google maps could be wrong! The area and school were too new and the map was not accurate. I guess that was what the 14-year-old German boy kept shaking his head “no” about.

At lunch a colleague who sat beside me gave me a driven tour of the town of Winkler. She showed me where she lived, where she grew up, and how the town was changing. She shared about some of the new tensions happening with the influx of Mexican Mennonites. She even treated me to an Ice Cap! As we were leaving class that day, my friend led me to the nearest gas station to fill my near empty gas tank. She then drove me out to the main highway and pointed me in the direction of Winnipeg. It was nice to live among caring people. That day I

discovered that new experiences would cause growth even when you were not looking to grow or change. (Story of Remembered Experiences, written on May 21, 2011)

Since then I have not had any desire to hit the road and explore another rural community. I cannot help but wonder if those short moments of panic when I did not know where I was and could not communicate with people in the neighbourhood might be a small fragment of what my EAL students and families at school feel on a regular or daily basis as they find their way in a new country and in schools.

The Invitation

As with all university courses, part of our class was spent discussing upcoming assignments. The course in Altona was no different. In fact the final assignment was the most important thing I took away from the course. I learned the value of stopping and inviting students to share their stories, and then most importantly, listening with compassion. As part of this final assignment we were challenged to connect to people and to their hearts, extend our teaching to reach beyond our normal routines, create opportunities for conversations, and share what came from our experience.

The invitation was to do something artistic and creative. For the assignment, I chose to reach out to the students in my classroom and create a conversation about how we all came to be in one classroom together and share the journey each of us took in

arriving at the same place. It was the beginning of *Our Class Story* and in many ways the beginning of my research.

Coming to the Research: *Our Class Story*

I began thinking about how little I actually knew about the personal stories of the students in my classroom at school. I knew the children I worked with very well on an academic level. I also knew a little about their backgrounds, but I had never thought to open a conversation about their experiences growing up and arriving in our classroom. My students were not the LAL students we had been learning about in the course; however, they each came from very different life experiences, spoke many languages, and came from around the world. I wanted to engage in a class story project which would support students as well as my learning as we discovered new things about each other. The project shifted my teaching and my classroom landscape forever. As a result of the project I learned an incredible amount about students I had been teaching all year and it was now May! The students seemed to have changed too. We became closer as we each shared and told our stories, over and over.

The stories took over our room as we worked on them together and at home with families. I had sent a note home explaining *Our Class Story* project we were working on and invited parents to participate by also recording their ideas. Children brought in photographs that showed their journeys to our classroom. In an attempt to keep their photographs intact, I scanned them and sent them back home with students. We compiled

the photos into a photo story, using the computer program called Photostory 3. Each child narrated his or her story of how he or she came to our class. When we were ready, we shared it with the school and families. There seemed to be a remarkable shift that happened that day in our school. I began noticing changes among students, siblings, families, teachers, and especially, myself.

The Research Puzzle

With my Early Years students I have continued to experiment with different forms of sharing *Our Class Story*. Over the past 4 years I have observed changes that have taken place in my classroom and in my teaching. It is my hope that through reflecting on my teaching practice and the process I have undertaken with my class I might be able to understand my research puzzle: How has creating and writing *Our Class Story* over the past 4 years shifted my teaching practice and beliefs about teaching EAL Early Years Learners?

Significance of the Research

Students who enter school systems today will grow up to work, live, and play in a world that can only be imagined. Students will need skills, knowledge, and an understanding of the world around them which will help them collaborate, create, and succeed in an increasingly diverse society. Students must exit schools with skills that will support them in the world that awaits them. Students need to be able to read, speak,

write, and collaborate with others in a variety of forms to share and communicate their ideas. The foundation for these skills begins in the early years.

As a reflective practitioner in an Early Year's classroom, the children I teach change every year. In the past 10 of my 12 years of teaching, I have noticed that the cultural, racial, and linguistic diversity of students has dramatically increased. It seems that each year students enter the classroom with even more diversity than during the previous year. As I have travelled down this socially changing path I have come across many signposts which have caused my thinking to shift in new ways.

Statistics reflect this changing dynamic in our schools. In 2009, Manitoba had the most immigrant and refugee arrivals in over 60 years. A total of 13,530 immigrants arrived and 4,738 were between the ages of 0 and 19. The highest number of newcomers settled in Winnipeg, which received 73.3% or 9,910 immigrants. Of the new arrivals, only 79.2% spoke a language considered in the top 10 dominant languages of newcomers to Manitoba. The remaining 20.8% of the newcomers represented a variety of languages and dialects from around the world (Manitoba Labour & Immigration, 2009). These statistics are reflected in the growing EAL student population in Manitoba classrooms and through government curricula to address the needs of all learners.

Canada will likely continue to grow as a multilingual nation, already having over 100 languages spoken (Milton, 2006). Cortazzi and Jin (2007) acknowledge that "Diversity seems to be increasing in terms of the number range of languages spoken; pupils' ethnic, social, cultural and religious backgrounds; their proficiency in English

ranging from [absent] to good social use but weakness in academic literacy” (p. 647). We are a country that has opened its doors to the world. It is time to open the minds of Canadians and talk about what it means to live, work, learn, and play in a diverse society.

This is the future picture of our classrooms and society. Educators can build bridges of familiarity, connectedness, and understanding between Early Years students, parents, and schools. In these ways children may be supported to value each other’s languages, cultures, and beliefs. Sharing stories and fragments of our histories is no easy task. When a story is personally connected to you it is more than words on a page, a picture, or a voice travelling through the air; it is the beginning of understanding someone or something new. The story becomes a memory and a piece of you. Saito (2008) writes that “a missing component, a ‘sequel’, is exploring what’s inside others” (p. 205). My sense is that this deeper understanding will support students as they learn about their peers, their histories, and life journeys. It is my hope that doing so will support students as they compose their lives in and outside of schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

As I began this journey into examining the impact *Our Class Story* has had on my teaching practice, I first wanted to deepen my knowledge and understanding of what previous research has already uncovered. I examined several areas which supported my research interests. Firstly, I looked at the changing dynamic of mainstream Early Years Classrooms in Manitoba. Secondly, I looked at how learning takes place for EAL students in the mainstream classroom and who are our EAL Early Years learners. Finally, I explored what research was available on the experience of the teacher working with EAL children.

A Picture of Changing Early Years Classrooms in Manitoba

In July 2011 the Manitoba government released a draft of the K–12 Curriculum Framework for English as an Additional Language and Literacy, Academics, and Language Programming. The curriculum recognized that Manitoba students “are from differing first-language backgrounds and have varying amounts of education in their first language” (Manitoba Education, pp. 1–7). For this reason, the Manitoba curriculum (2011) stated, “The goals for students who are learning English as an additional language are the same, but they take a different learning path towards achieving them” (pp. 1–8). In the Manitoba K–12 EAL/LAL Framework, Early Years students are defined as students in Kindergarten to Grade 3.

Teachers working in the province have a variety of new challenges as they begin to meet the needs of all students in their care. The programming taking shape in Early Years classrooms around Manitoba is as diverse as the variety of EAL situations presented in Manitoba classrooms. The K-12 EAL/LAL Framework (2011) recognizes:

EAL programming occurs in a variety of settings in Manitoba. The entire population of one school may speak the same home language or dialect and begin learning English as the additional language of instruction at the same time; the EAL learners in another school may speak 20 or more home languages from distinctly different language groups and arrive throughout the year at varying stages of English language development. The children in some schools are born in Canada but are raised in a non-English-speaking cultural milieu, while many other students have arrived recently and must adjust to a new culture or to life in a multicultural setting. (Manitoba Education, pp. 1–17)

A teacher in Manitoba must be prepared to adapt and teach in any of these situations as EAL/LAL populations continue to grow.

Instruction of EAL Learners in a Mainstream Early Years Classroom: How Does Learning Take Place?

The EAL Early Years classroom experience is uniquely different from other EAL classroom settings. The young children who enter these classrooms are learning much more than English. Crandall (2003) identifies the educational challenges as

elementary ESL teachers may be required to teach initial literacy, provide the major language arts instruction, introduce academic concepts, promote academic and social language development, and help students make up for missed prior schooling, as well as serve as counsellor, interpreter, and community and school liaison. (p. 1)

Young children are not only adding a language, they are re-shaping their identity and discovering for the first time how to engage and belong within a community of learners. The re-shaping of a young child's identity becomes even more complex when experiencing school in a new country or in an unfamiliar language. Watts-Taffe and Truscott (2000) explain that "ESL students are also faced with the challenge of learning a new culture" (p. 259). As students acquire a new language, search for acceptance, and adapt to a new culture, it becomes apparent that teachers must be awakened to the many dimensions of learning for EAL Early Years students. Watts-Taffe and Truscott argue that "the importance of teachers' and peers' validation and understanding of the child's culture cannot be overstated" (p. 260). Through a multicultural approach to instruction which is inclusive of all students in the classroom, students can begin to find acceptance, build friendships, and begin to see similarities, even when great diversity exists within the classroom walls.

As children find acceptance and feel comfortable in their classroom, they begin to rely on their peers for language support. Toohey and Day (1999) examined this phenomenon in the instructional practices of teachers as they built language in Early

Years classrooms. This study occurred over 4 years and followed two cohorts of EAL Early Years learners. Using video, notes, and tape recorders they captured EAL students engaging in whole class lessons. Toohey and Day discovered that children used more language and participated when they were able to access and benefit from their peers to find the confidence to engage and participate in classroom lessons. Toohey and Day found “building, maintaining, and protecting one’s identity in a setting interacts with how one participated in an activity there” (p. 50).

Toohey, Day, and Manyak (2007) revisited the issue of how Early Years classroom practice influences and shapes the identities of students as they are acquiring English as an additional language. Their research suggested “that young children’s second language learning is similarly linked to and mediated by the issues of identity” (p. 626). Learning English for young children is social. English language learners want to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness to their peers which is valuable and supports young children as they find their new identity and discover the culture of the Early Years classroom. Toohey, Day, and Manyak suggested the process of students constructing or reconstructing their identities is highly complex: “Viewed from a sociocultural perspective, classroom instruction represents a set of social practices in which children (and teachers) construct identities—identities that in turn mediate their experience with English” (p. 627). The process of guiding students as they shape and construct their identities allows them to discover not only themselves but how they relate and connect to others. I hoped to understand how the process of creating *Our Class Story* impacted both

my instruction and how I changed during the 4 years of the project. Before engaging in this inquiry, it was important to understand the students who worked and lived alongside me during this journey.

The EAL Early Years Learner

Historically, research and literature on EAL Early Years children has changed over the last century. Educators have shifted their thinking from a grammar-based instruction method, popular from the early 1900s to the 1950s, to a communicative method which was based on a sociolinguistic foundation that was primarily used in the 1970s. The communicative method has since evolved and has supported a context-embedded approach to primary literacy learning (Cox & Boyd-Batstone, 2009). Teaching young EAL Early Years learners English through the content areas allows teachers to address two different forms of language discourse young children are acquiring. Cummins' (1980) theory of language proficiency has previously been depicted as an iceberg. His model describes how EAL children develop two sets of language discourse. The visible part of the iceberg represents the social language and the much larger hidden part of the iceberg represents the academic language students need to find success at school (Walter, 2004). The environment, visual cues, and methods of instruction all provide young children with a context to understand and make meaning from classroom lessons and the academic language which teachers utilize. Cummins, Bismilla, Cohen, Giampapa, and Leoni (2005a) argue that educators should "be willing to examine

critically the implicit assumptions underlying curricula development for the ‘generic student’ and think imaginatively about how bilingual/ESL students can more rapidly gain access to the curriculum” (p. 25). It is this argument which supports educators as they critically examine their practice and rely on their experience and knowledge to look closer, think bigger, and teach children, not curricula.

Child development and student learning examined through a sociocultural lens suggests that learning is a negotiated conversation the child has with his or her environment. Children learn through their social interactions and from communication with others in their classrooms, extra-curricular activities, and family settings. As children are learning in these environments they are viewing their world through their cultural perspective (VanPatten & Williams, 2008). As students acquire English they are on a journey. At first, visuals and concrete objects are used to support them as they focus on learning English. Students need a lot of opportunities for meaningful practice to build their understanding (Coyle, 2009). As their language increases Early Years students begin to negotiate language with their peers and later with their teacher. Varying degrees of scaffolding are needed for students to find success. Incorporating students’ life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and schema of their lived experiences into the learning process permits students to draw on the familiar and move their language learning forward (Clandinin & Connelly, as cited in Chung, 2008). This process of negotiation of meaning happens between teachers and students. When teachers listen, record, and validate stories which hold significance and meaning to the child, the child is

building the language that will support both the social and academic language needed to be successful at school. As students build meaning they co-construct their understanding of English (Gibbons, 2003).

While children are learning English as an additional language the communication of their stories happens in the many different languages that children speak. Not only do children speak their mother tongue as they learn English, they also communicate their ideas through a variety of other literacies including art, technology, dance, movement, drama, and music (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). Teachers need to discover new ways to support students so there is a record of their stories. Children need to be able to share their stories in a lasting way that communicates their knowledge of the world around them. Every student has a unique history, an interesting story, and a journey that has brought him or her into a Canadian classroom.

The changing dynamic of Early Years classrooms has been recognized by the creation of new provincial documents to support educators. Approaching the diversity within an Early Years classroom requires careful thought and planning as teachers guide EAL students as they learn a new language, build friendships, embrace a new culture, and ultimately, we hope, find acceptance in their new classroom. Research has enlightened educators about how EAL learners acquire an additional language. Knowledge of EAL Early Years students and how they learn has become easier to access within a focused area of research. Through this body of knowledge scholars have begun to explore the experiences of the teacher.

The Teacher Experience

The experience of the teacher working with EAL students in the mainstream setting is an area of research which is still in its infancy. Inquiring into the experiences of mainstream classroom teachers working with EAL students provides further insight and understanding into the complexities of teaching in the diverse classrooms in Manitoba. Learning and discovering how teachers are shifting their practice to meet the needs of the students in their classrooms can inform instruction and education for teachers working with EAL students in the future.

Looking into the past, early qualitative research completed by Penfield (1987) examined teachers' perspectives on teaching EAL children in their mainstream classrooms. Through her inquiry into teacher experience her purpose was "to uncover the regular classroom teacher's implicit beliefs and assumptions about those whom they teach and those with whom they work—from their own point of view" (p. 23). Penfield gathered her data through an open-ended 15-question survey which resulted in 162 usable questionnaires out of a possible 172. Using the themes which were presented in the responses, Penfield uncovered "five broad categories: (a) programmatic setting and instruction, (b) training needs, (c) Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and their parents, (d) peer interaction, and (e) role of the ESL teacher" (p. 25).

Almost 25 years later, teachers are still facing similar challenges in classrooms. Penfield (1987) found that teachers "understood the need to improve academic learning for LEP students, yet they appeared to have little knowledge of how to integrate content

and L2 development, viewing these two as separate and distinct rather than as an integrated process” (p. 28). In addition, the teachers struggled in communicating with students and their families while trying to meet the cultural and individual needs of all of their EAL students. Penfield suggested that “the teacher plays a key role in creating and controlling the social climate” (p. 30) and in order for EAL students to progress teachers must “learn new ways for improving classroom dynamics” (p. 30). The teacher participants in the study also acknowledged the many ways EAL students contributed to the classroom culture. Teachers felt that the increase in diversity led to an increase in cooperation among students.

Penfield (1987) also found teachers managing peer relations in the classroom in several ways. Teachers acknowledged peer friction as one challenge. Some teachers found using a buddy system engaged students in collaborative projects, while other teachers “sought to bridge cultural differences by having Limited English Proficient students share something about their home country with the class or by introducing a lesson on friendship or kindness” (p. 33).

As a result of Penfield’s (1987) research she concluded that mainstream teachers and administrators need additional training and knowledge of how to teach EAL learners and provide optimal language learning settings. As professionals, mainstream teachers must work together to explore collaborative methods for supporting students while encouraging EAL teachers to train and support their colleagues in the classroom as they manage the diversity they face each day.

These needs will only continue to grow as the cultural diversity of Canadian society increases with government initiatives to attract immigrant families to Manitoba. The inclusion of students' lives in our daily practice as classroom teachers must be addressed as we build an environment in which all learners feel they are accepted, belong, and can take the necessary risks to become independent learners in the Canadian school system.

Understanding the importance of the elementary teacher's influence on EAL students in the mainstream classroom, I began my study. What I encountered on this Early Years journey was a gap in the research. In order to find information on the teacher's experience I needed to broaden my search to include Middle Years and Senior Years mainstream teachers' experiences. Through this process I was able to find a limited amount of research within Canada by Wang, Many, and Krumenaker (2008) and Chan (2006).

Wang et al. (2008) used a case study method to examine the experiences of Tom, a Senior Years social studies teacher. The focus of their research was to examine how mainstreaming EAL students had affected teachers and their experiences in the classroom. They reported that "mainstreaming had a significant effect on him" (p. 74) and that the effects of mainstreaming the Grade 9 EAL students "was seen mainly in the differentiated instruction he provided and the inclusive strategies that he used" (p. 74). Like many teachers who work with EAL students Tom had no formal training but continued to search for strategies which supported EAL students in his classroom.

Wang et al. (2008) identified several instructional methods which would support EAL students in Tom's mainstream Social Studies classroom. He used cooperative learning, peer teaching, bilingual groups, visual aids, scaffolding of prior knowledge, and the use of students' first language. These researchers addressed some of the problems that surfaced which were not predicted, nor reported in previous research. Through interviews with both students and Tom they revealed that in certain circumstances the teacher had shortened tasks to ensure all students found success. As the teacher, Tom felt that he was only able to cover the surface content with not enough time to explore topics in more depth. Students felt that the majority of the tasks were simple question-and-answers with little opportunity to engage in higher level critical thinking.

Although the grade level and content of lessons vary greatly between secondary and elementary school, I have experienced some of the same struggles as Tom did while teaching in an Early Years classroom. Teachers must plan careful and differentiated lessons so EAL students can observe, participate, and eventually contribute when they are ready to engage in a variety of tasks and class discussions. The search and design process for lessons which meet the diverse needs of all students will be ongoing throughout my teaching career.

In another Canadian research study using narrative inquiry, Chan (2006) unpacked the stories of teacher-participants as they negotiated an overnight field trip experience for Grade 7 and 8 students. Chan examined the experiences of two middle

school teachers as they negotiated cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity as it surfaced in their daily practice as teachers.

Chan (2006) illustrated a school which celebrated and recognized diversity on a daily basis. She found that despite one teacher-participant's "willingness to address issues of diversity in conversations with his colleagues and students, and to be culturally-sensitive in his practices and in his curriculum, there were differences in perspective" which created tensions around the overnight field trip (p. 163). Chan explored the different perspectives of teachers and students to reveal that "acknowledging culture in the curriculum is complicated: good intentions may be misconstrued, or individuals may bring to the school context experiences that shape their interpretations of school events in ways that differ significantly from what was intended" (p. 165).

As teachers address cultural diversity in the classroom tensions may arise. Teachers, students, and their parents bring their past with them which shapes who they are and how they engage in the learning experiences at school. Creating space for students' personal stories within the classroom walls is also an invitation for them to bring part of their history and prior experiences into the classroom. Chan's (2006) narrative approach allowed her to support teachers as they discovered "that their beliefs about curriculum sometimes differed from those of the parents of their students—to the point of conflicting—and that they were faced with the dilemma of how to 'accommodate' for such vastly different views" (p. 167). As teachers engage in culturally diverse lessons with their students established attitudes emerge from all individuals.

Chan noted teachers “come to teaching with strong views about some aspects of teaching. These strong views may also be interpreted as ‘biases’ in some situations” (p. 170). These moments allow tension in the classroom to rise to the surface where it can be discussed within the classroom community.

Chan’s (2006) work helped me understand that teachers’ lives do have an impact on the classroom landscape. The teachers’ views, past experiences, and present understanding of cultural diversity support and guide their current practice in the classroom. Chan suggested that “difficulties arise, however, when we realize that many teachers do not have such curricular experiences to draw on” (p. 172). As Canadian schools are beginning to show rapid growth in diversity many teachers have entered the profession with limited personal exposure to a diverse educational system. Instead of focusing on past experiences to support teachers as they manage culture in their curriculum, Chan suggested that teachers

who demonstrate a willingness to learn about diverse cultures and languages, and believe in equality and equity for their students regardless of cultural backgrounds and gender, need to address and discuss the events that may arise as diverse cultures intersect on their school landscape to identify issues of relevance to the particular ethnic communities involved. (p. 173)

This process would look different for each teacher based on his or her knowledge, a willingness to engage in the process, and past experiences in the educational system.

I do not recall growing up in a linguistically diverse educational system. However, as an Early Years teacher I now find myself immersed in a multicultural setting and I want to provide the best education for all students. My world expanded when I took the chance and drove an hour and a half to a small town for the Literacy Academics and Language class which started me on this journey. As a result of the past 4 years I have changed who I am and how I teach EAL students. I have felt tensions, excitement, and connectedness to my students while working on *Our Class Story*. I am encouraged by the possibilities and can only imagine how *Our Class Story* will shift my teaching practice in the future.

CHAPTER THREE:

NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

All stories have purpose. As a teacher, I have used stories to connect with others, reminisce about experiences, explain an event, and even to teach a lesson. Telling stories goes beyond my time in the classroom—it is part of me. As an educator, friend, wife, mother, daughter, and sister, stories surround me. Sharing stories with others is an invitation I extend to people so they can enter into my world. In the space of sharing a story with those around me I learn, make connections, and form relationships which ultimately shape who I am becoming. Telling stories is an opportunity to understand myself, engage with the world and the place I hold within it. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that when “you understand the world around you narratively . . . then it makes sense to study the world narratively” (p. 17).

How I Arrived at Narrative Inquiry as a Research Methodology

I have always had a great deal of resistance to completing a thesis. I love writing. I just did not feel like I had anything engaging or passionate to write about. Clearly a shift happened during the journey of completing my course work.

In the fall of 2009 I registered for my second course toward my course-based Master’s degree: EDUB 7210 Seminar in ESL Theory and Practice. I was eager to begin all of my readings. I started searching for assigned articles and printing them for future

classes. After a day's work I had a 3-inch binder packed full of everything I would need to read over the next 12 weeks. As I tried to read the first article a heavy weight began to push down on my shoulders. This was the first time I felt I was inadequate as a reader. I began highlighting what I thought were the important sections, then the words I did not know, then paragraphs I needed to revisit, and before I knew it, the whole page was a rainbow of highlighted colours. Then I cried. The following evening I pulled out a notebook and started a personal dictionary. I wrote down the words I did not know and researched how to pronounce them, their meaning, and the general era the word came from. The last piece of information was rather useless other than providing a little amusement in discovering the age of these ancient words! No wonder teachers do not invest time in reading research articles. The language is not easily accessible to the already overworked teacher. However, I remained in the course and completed all my readings. At the end of the 12 weeks my vocabulary expanded and everything started to make sense again. I was relieved that I now understood the articles and that I was in the course-based route!

Then, in January 2010, I met Simmee Chung (2008) through reading her Master's thesis for an assignment in the EDUB 7220 Research Issues and Applications in TESL course. My relationship with her work was cantankerous. I printed out almost 100 pages. I stared at it for about a week. I kept thinking "why would anyone want to write anything that is 100 pages long!" As the assignment deadline approached I gathered a pen, her thesis, and drew myself a bubble bath.

My plan was to trap myself in a tank of water so I could not easily distract myself from the task at hand. As I read her research I was drawn in and I completed reading her entire thesis in just over an hour and a half. It was engaging, interesting, and research-based all at once. Was that even possible? Through reading her work I felt connected as though I knew her, even though we had never met. We eventually shared a few emails. As a result of reading her research many “firsts” came: it was the first time I enjoyed reading in graduate school, it was the first time I shared my readings with my colleagues, and it was the first time I thought “I could do that. I could write a thesis. Someone might learn from my experience.” (Story of Remembered Experiences, written on August 20, 2011)

I had never considered using narrative inquiry as a research methodology until I read the work of Simmee Chung (2008) in January 2010. Her research bounced between her own autobiographical narratives and those of the participants. My mind began to spin and the wheels turned over at the possibility that I might be able to use this methodology to explore my teaching practice in a more systematic way.

My reasoning has always been solid for me. If I am to take on the responsibility of research it must be meaningful to the work I am currently engaged in, move my thinking forward, and support other teachers as they grow. As a practicing teacher I enjoy reading articles which challenge my thinking, provide insight into the primary classroom, and inspire me to try new things. Many of the articles which contribute to the research field are not always easily accessible to the classroom teacher. Often, when I

read articles at the graduate level, I am required to draw on my new vocabulary to understand the research. Through sharing my journey and exploration into my teaching practice I am able to contribute to the research field by presenting a perspective from the viewpoint of the practicing teacher, for the practicing teacher. In sharing my experiences I have discovered teaching strategies, methods, and processes which have supported EAL students as they settled into their new classroom.

Writing narratively invites others to join my experience and to journey alongside me as I relive *Our Class Story* over 4 years. I am ready to welcome others into my life through an autobiographical account of my research and teaching experiences. My research focus is on me, my thoughts, feelings, and experiences. For this reason, as I write about my teaching practice I am intentionally positioning the children and their experiences in the background.

Narrative Inquiry as a Research Methodology

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method of research whereby the researcher is able to study the human experience. The Oxford Dictionary defines narrative as “a spoken or written account of connected events” (“Narrative”, 2011). However, a narrative inquirer understands living, telling, retelling, and reliving a storied experience is more than interpreting a sequence of events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Inquiring narratively into an event considers the physical landscape, social dimensions, emotions, and the impact of an experience within the space of time. In the process of inquiring

deeper into the storied experience an individual finds meaning and interprets experiences in different ways. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) define narrative inquiry as “the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (p. 24).

Narrative inquiry is shaped by certain qualities. During the research process, a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space unfolds around the researcher where he or she focuses on temporality, sociality, and place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that the process allows “our inquiries to travel—inward, outward, backward, forward, and situated within place” (p. 49). I have created this diagram to help me understand this three dimensional space of narrative inquiry:



In the diagram, the grey circle represents the place in time of the experience, while the black circle represents the people who are present during the experience. The inward exploration is the internal process of people, their thoughts, hopes, feelings, and values. The outward exploration contains the physical and social environment, what is seen, what is heard, and what actions take place. The arrows represent backward and forward spaces which allow the researcher to examine the past, the present situation, and give value to the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Through the three-

dimensional inquiry space the researcher is able to explore and understand experience in deeper ways.

In narrative inquiry, people are valued. They are not exemplars, categorized, or turned into statistics. The narrative inquirer examines not only the individual, but how he or she creates a life within the setting and influences of the society. The people engaged in narrative inquiry are not static, they are dynamic. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that people “are in a process of personal change and that from an educational point of view, it is important to be able to narrate the person in terms of the process” (p. 30).

Examining the impact the four class stories has had on my teaching beliefs and how I have approached learning is useful in determining how I can move forward to support EAL students within and beyond the classroom. Telling the story of how I changed and moved through this process is central to this narrative inquiry. Through this process my beliefs and ideas about teaching EAL students have collided and tensions have surfaced. Inquiring into these tensions and experiences of writing *Our Class Story* has required me to not only see the events, but the landscape, my reactions and interactions with others. My experiences could be interpreted in many ways. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that the inquirer show a “sense of tentativeness, usually expressed as a kind of uncertainty, about an event’s meaning” (p. 31). I have interpreted my experiences for one moment in time. As years pass, I may see my experience in new ways when I return to these stories. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006):

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

Storying my experience has helped clarify my understanding of past experiences. My current understanding about who I am as a teacher and what I believe has shifted through this dynamic process when new perspectives and ideas presented themselves.

As a narrative inquirer involved in the process, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that “the experience of tension at the boundaries is important to all of us as we think through our narrative inquiries and become autobiographically conscious of our own reactions to our work” (p. 46). My personal narratives have shifted and have been reconstructed to incorporate the new understandings that surfaced through this inquiry. Narrative inquiry has provided the space and

opportunity to look within myself to observe changes in my practice and beliefs as well as my professional growth over the past 4 years. As I shared the Grade 1 classroom with over 70 students and worked on *Our Class Story* alongside them, I was changed as an individual and as a teacher. The presence of the children on the classroom landscape influenced my experiences. Without the children *Our Class Story* would not have existed. However, the focus of this narrative inquiry is on my experiences as a teacher, and not on the experiences of the children.

Awakening to the Rhythms of Narrative Inquiry

During my graduate course work, I discovered that there was a place for autobiographical narrative inquiry within research. It was then that I realized I wanted to inquire into my teaching practice and the shifts in my thinking. Through an autobiographical narrative inquiry I was able to explore and unpack my experiences working with EAL Early Years students in the classroom so that myself and others would learn from these experiences while still respecting the students whom I taught. My narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) occurred in three phases: being in the field, composing field texts, and composing research texts. I began by living in my classroom as a researcher. My field texts documented my personal experiences in my classroom. As I narratively inquired into my field texts I understood and discovered the transformations which had occurred in my teaching practice as I wrote the research texts.

Being in the Field: Living and Telling Our Class Stories

As I enter my classroom every day I bring my personal experiences with me. My personal history shapes who I am as a teacher. In narrative inquiry acknowledging my starting point is part of this process. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlight “the importance of acknowledging the centrality of the researcher’s own experience—the researcher’s own livings, tellings, retellings and relivings” (p. 70).

My research began with me, what I had brought to the experience, and how I saw and interpreted the events that had unfolded in front of me. I had taught for 9 years at my present school, 5 of them in the current classroom. Therefore, I had been living the experiences of working on *Our Class Story* alongside the students for the past 4 years. Remembering where this journey began has made me return to my experience in rural Manitoba where I was challenged to reach out and touch others in their hearts. The purpose and process have evolved and changed each year as a result of my engagement in the collaborative writing process with students.

In the spring of 2008, the first year of *Our Class Story*, I was driven to completion by deadlines and a graded university assignment. Realizing the potential of *Our Class Story* I attempted another story in the fall of 2008 without the constraints of deadlines and the boundaries changed. In January 2010 in the course Research Issues and Applications in TESL I participated in a Research Conversation Circle. Through this experience, I realized that I had a story to share when I began telling my experiences of the third *Our Class Story* to my colleagues in the course as I was living it. Through sharing and

listening to my colleagues' responses to my work I slowly became conscious of my engagement in living alongside my students while working on *Our Class Story*. I continued to live and tell the fourth class story to my colleagues at the University during the 2010–2011 school year. Over the past 4 years the students and I lived and told our stories, histories, and experiences as we wrote *Our Class Story*. We shared our journeys and learned about one another's lives in deeper and more meaningful ways. I wanted to capture my experience throughout this meaningful work in this inquiry.

Composing Field Texts: Documenting My Experiences

Writing autobiographically raises different tensions to be negotiated: purpose, roles, transitions, and time. I did not enter a new space to immerse myself in the research process; instead, I negotiated a dual role that I played as teacher and researcher within my own classroom. It was a struggle to find the time for both roles of narrative inquirer and teacher to exist within the confines of my day. Through this autobiographical narrative process my purpose became clear: I was attempting to make sense of the journey which unfolded in hope of discovering how the process of creating *Our Class Story* was supporting EAL children in the Early Years in my classroom.

As a classroom teacher inquiring into my own practice, I was fortunate to feel comfortable with the researcher role within the classroom. Living in the midst, I felt comfortable writing about my experiences and I approached my journal writing with sensitive eyes. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasized:

The researcher needs to be there long enough and to be a sensitive reader of and questioner of situations in an effort to grasp the huge number of events and stories, the many twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every movement and show up in what appears to be the new and inexperienced eyes of the researcher as mysterious code. (p. 77)

In the process of gathering, writing, and making notes on my observations I was able to see the key moments which twisted and turned the path where I journeyed down. The path I travelled creating *Our Class Story* became clear and the shifts in my practice and beliefs about teaching EAL Early Years learners surfaced.

My transitions were defined by the school year. As one year came to a close one *Our Class Story* ended and another new class story began. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that “[n]arrative inquiries do end, at least in a formal sense” (p. 74). I know the work I have done will be ongoing throughout my career. However, after 4 years of jotting reminders for later reflection, writing in day planners, and writing my experiences in journals, I have found the end. As difficult some days were, I found time to reflect and write. As a teacher, I was involved in every process and undertaking in the classroom. My struggle was finding the time to do it all. Sometimes I wished I had four arms! A Grade 1 classroom was a very busy place, but with practice and a schedule, I was able to find my way.

The field texts I created for each of the 4 years changed and improved in detail and depth as I continued to document and reflect on my teaching practice. In the first

year and second year of the project my field texts consisted of notes scribbled into my lesson plans in addition to the movie and book we created as a class. In the third year of the project my field texts consisted of my lesson plans, sticky notes, a dated agenda I used as a journal, as well as photographs, in addition to the book and movie we created as a class. In the final year of the project in addition to the documentation in year three, I also chose specific events from my dated agenda journal and expanded on these to write longer and more detailed journal entries once a week which I kept in a binder.

Here is an example of how a sticky note evolved from an entry into the dated agenda journal into a detailed journal entry in my binder. On January 28, 2011, I scribbled on a sticky note and placed it in my day planner beside a sharing activity I had planned. The note read “did not work.” This sticky note was a reminder that I needed to change the parameters of our sharing experience. On the following Monday I attempted sharing in a different way. Instead of having one child share to the whole group, students shared with their peers at their tables. After school I recalled the sharing experience and in my dated agenda journal I wrote:

Today we talked about table sharing and made a place for it on our daily agenda.

It seemed to work well for us as everyone had a chance to share. It took about 8 minutes, something I can feel good about. (Dated Agenda Journal, January 31, 2011)

That evening I was able to build on my quick note in the dated agenda journal and write more about my experience in the classroom. The end result was the following journal entry that I wrote and put in my binder:

Our sharing time has moved forward in a direction I feel good about. My students seemed to respond well to the idea of sharing at their tables. Tension is the word which can accurately describe my experiences with sharing in the classroom over the past few weeks. I needed to eliminate the large amount of time we were spending on individual sharing. The students wanted to share and I wanted that too. There is great value in sharing with each other; however, what was being shared and the length of time was problematic for me. By sharing in tables all students had a chance to speak and share their news within a short period of time. I am curious to see where this leads in the next few days. (Journal Entry, January 31, 2011)

This process of deciding which events to expand upon was selective within itself. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested “memory is selective, shaped and retold in the continuum of one’s experience” (p. 143). At times it was hard to figure out what needed to be recorded, while at other times there was a great deal to write. Spending time writing and reflecting on my teaching practice and the impact of *Our Class Story* has allowed me to find the answer to my initial question: How has creating and writing *Our Class Story* over the past 4 years shifted my teaching practice and beliefs about teaching EAL Early Years Learners?

Composing Research Text: Inquiring into My Experiences

Keeping the purpose of my journey at the front of my work kept me focused and guided me as I composed my research texts. My first purpose for engaging in this inquiry was to learn about myself as a teacher, what has shaped my work, and how I have grown in the process. Second, I wrote this thesis for the benefit of my future EAL students. I wanted to understand how to best support their diverse needs and build a strong community of learners in my classroom. Third, and finally, I was writing to support my colleagues working with the growing cultural and linguistic diversity present in Manitoba schools.

I reached a point in my journey with *Our Class Story* where I looked back over my shoulder and realized that it was time to unpack from the path I had travelled in order to guide the future direction of *Our Class Story*. This inquiry was not the end of *Our Class Story*. It was a pause to reflect on the journey and to discover what the future might hold.

After my thesis proposal defense at the end of January 2012, I moved forward creating my research texts. It seemed natural to use a journal format to represent my experiences of creating *Our Class Story* alongside the students I worked with over the past 4 years. I could record what I was doing, where and when an event happened, and how I responded in the most realistic way. I could capture my emotions, thoughts, and processes as I navigated my way through 4 years of creating *Our Class Story*. My inquiry occurred as I constructed the four “fictionalized” (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, &

Murray Orr, 2010, p. 85) teaching journals as my research texts. As I pieced together the process and story of my journey across time and place, I discovered the common threads which ran throughout the 4 years of this project. I looked at the changes which occurred in the space of the Grade 1 classroom and discussed possibilities for the future class stories to come. As I reflected back onto my inquiry I looked for big ideas about how the story had evolved and impacted my practice and how I had changed to meet the needs of all children being educated in my classroom.

As I created all the journal entries in these four fictionalized teaching journals I paid careful attention to the three dimensions of narrative inquiry: temporality, sociality, and place. The dates and timelines for all the journal entries were an accurate reflection of my experience in the classroom. To help me construct my research texts I created a framework to guide me through each year of the project. The purpose of the framework was to help me discover key moments where shifts occurred in my thinking and teaching practice. On the framework I placed the diagram I created to understand the three dimensions of narrative inquiry at the top of the page. Below I created a chart filled with all of the different ways and perspectives I wanted to consider as I was re-reading my field texts. I used one inquiry frame for each year of the project. Using the frame I read through my field texts multiple times to ensure I focused on all of the different dimensions. Through these careful readings of my field texts which included my actual journal entries, day planners, photographs, and the actual books written with my classes over time I discovered key moments, events, and experiences where my teaching practice

and beliefs shifted to meet the needs of my EAL Early Years students. I did not focus on individual students in my classroom; instead I explored my beliefs about teaching and how they were challenged through my experiences writing *Our Class Story* alongside the students I worked with. For example, when I reconstructed the fictionalized journal entries for year one I began by using the framework I created to guide my readings of the different field texts. I noted key moments which influenced the direction of the project. Once my framework was overflowing with possibilities I began sorting the events which had shifted my practice into sequential order. This process in itself was selective. Once I identified the experiences which had impacted my teaching practice I began to string them together into fictionalized journal entries. My 12 years of experience as an elementary classroom teacher also allowed me to fill in the richness and complexity needed to join these events into the story that unfolded.

The four teaching journals that follow in Chapter 4 tell the story of how I have developed *Our Class Story* over the course of 4 years. They record my feelings, observations, and the process of my professional practice as it happened. There are four distinct journals in the pages that follow, each representing a separate class story. The first two teaching journals illustrate the creative process in addition to illuminating the challenges I faced as a teacher engaged in the collaborative storytelling process. In years three and four, my teaching journals shifted from a reconstruction of each project to a reflection on significant events which arose from the process of writing *Our Class Story*.

Ethical Considerations in Narrative Inquiry

Ethical issues surround us as teachers, adults, students, and researchers. As an adult, I am bound by the laws of my community and the values that I hold. As a teacher, I have a code of conduct, for which my first priority is to students. Narrative inquiry respects and requires the researcher to work within a three-dimensional space which allows me to maintain my beliefs, values, and the core of my teaching philosophy that children, above all, come first in my classroom.

As I inquired into my practice I was creating a relationship between two of my roles: teacher and researcher. Relational narrative inquiry pushes against the traditional ideas of how research is conducted. Huber and Clandinin (2002) describe this tension as “a kind of living alongside that pushed against earlier research notions of distance and maintaining objectivity” (p. 788). Throughout this process I maintained a sense of responsibility for future implications as I documented and shared my stories. As time moves forward my stories will grow and change with new experiences. Through narrative inquiry there is an understanding that research occurred at a certain moment in time, and in a particular setting with specific people. Once time has passed, stories will grow and change.

My interactions with students during the past 4 years of *Our Class Story* was vital to the shifts in my personal beliefs that have altered how I plan, manage, and teach EAL students in my classroom. Without my interactions with students, there would have been no experience to write about. The following Teaching Journals 1–4 have been

intentionally created to protect the students I taught. I omitted details in these journals which would identify students or specifics of their personal lives. The students' stories belonged to them and their contributions in the classroom should be honoured and protected with care and concern for their well being now and in the future. For this reason, I only explored my reactions, responses, and experiences of writing *Our Class Story* over the 4 years.

Throughout the process of writing the research texts I remained wakeful.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) defined wakefulness as what

others might think or say of our work . . . we need to be alert and aware of the contexts for our work, and we need to be alert and aware of questions about field texts and research texts from the point of view of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space. (p. 182)

Engaging in narrative inquiry was a journey which led me in many directions where new paths appeared and where tensions surfaced. Through the experience of living and telling the four class stories, my beliefs were challenged by the tensions that surfaced. Retelling or inquiring into the paths I have travelled while continuing to teach and live in the midst of new stories that are emerging will inform the future journey I have yet to make.

CHAPTER 4: JOURNEYING THROUGH 4 YEARS OF *OUR CLASS STORY*

Storytelling is the fabric of our lives. Stories shape who we are. They are the building blocks and structure of our foundations. Our stories contain our histories, experiences, and knowledge about the world in which we live and they prove our existence. They include trying times and celebrations. My journey into storytelling has set me on a path where I have discovered the narrative of my childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. My feelings and emotions have ranged widely throughout this process. I have discovered many different perspectives I have on my life experiences.

My personal reflections on my classroom have forced me to look inward to see how my culture, background, and language have influenced what I value, understand, and bring to the classroom. My cultural ideas influence how I teach and the impact I can make with students and the school community. This idea is echoed in Lotherington, Holland, Sotoudeh, and Zentena (2008): “When expanding on classroom languages, the teacher must analyze and understand her own cultural positioning and primary discourse in the classroom” (p. 140). This is not an easy task. Since I returned to university I have developed an increased awareness of who I am and how my education, family, and life experiences have shaped my own culture. I bring this to the classroom each day without choice; it is part of me. It is equally important to recognize that my self-awareness is an ongoing journey as each day changes who I am and how I see the world. With my

culture, language, and view of the world I enter my classroom with the goal of supporting children composing diverse lives to achieve the dreams they hold for their lives.

My journey has felt right as I move forward and share my understanding of storytelling and personal narratives. I know how I have arrived here, and yet I wonder how my self-awareness will change as I continue to discover new ways of comprehending my own story. Framing my experiences are the people I meet, the stories they tell, the places I visit, and the adventures we undertake. I have come to understand that as I unravel the stories of my life, they change; they never unravel the same way. Each time I explore and examine my life I learn something new. I view familiar situations from different perspectives or I gain new insights into parts of my life. Reflecting back I see how time and a kaleidoscope of influences have reframed my story in new ways. I am the same, yet I am different with each new day that passes.

What follows in this chapter are four teaching journals documenting my experiences in a Grade 1 classroom working on *Our Class Story*. Four years ago this storytelling journey began by chance as I met the challenge of going beyond my normal routine and connecting to the hearts of the students I worked with. As a result of this challenge I have discovered how to live alongside the students as individuals as they uncovered and shared their journey to our classroom. In the process of sharing our stories, recording our words and the journeys we made, I have changed as a teacher and grown as a professional. I conclude this chapter by discussing how my teaching practice

has shifted to support the growing number of EAL students who entered into my classroom over the 4 years.

Teaching Journal One: Meeting a Deadline!

May 2008–June 2008

Saturday, May 10, 2008

I survived another drive outside the city again. But it was worth it! It was another productive and informative day of learning in Altona. I loved this first class. I learned so much about EAL and LAL learners. During today's class the instructor went over the final assignment with us. Our final goal was to connect with our students beyond the scope of our normal day. She encouraged us to try something new, something creative. This stuck with me as I drove home. It seemed as though the further I drove the more the project came together. I mulled over small details and big details. By the time I pulled into my driveway I had it. I knew what I would do and the direction I would go. We would tell our story as a class—the story of how we came to our classroom and what brought us together. I know what we will do. Now to figure out what that will look like is left for another day!

Monday, May 12, 2008

The creative project for the course is starting to take shape. The project seems to be pulling itself together. The plan is not solid, but what is ever set in stone in a Grade 1

room? I want the students to help make some of the choices as we write our stories.

Tomorrow I will begin by sharing my own story to introduce the students to the project.

Hopefully they will “bite” and take interest in the project. I only have 4 weeks until it is due!

Tuesday, May 13, 2008

Today went much better than I thought it would. At the end of the day I invited the students to join me in the story-writing project I had in mind. I wanted them to remember our conversation when they went home. I am hopeful they may ask their families about their own stories. Around 3:15 I gathered the students on the carpet and put on my best thoughtful and curious face and said, “I was thinking over the weekend and I wondered how did we all end up here in our classroom?” After waiting for a few seconds I continued by sharing my own story.

This was the the first time I shared my story and I started right from the beginning. I told the students how when I was just in Kindergarten I knew I wanted to be a teacher. In my school memory book where it said “When I grow up I want to be . . .” I always wrote in “teacher.” I explained that I had come from a family of teachers; my mom, my dad, my aunt, my uncle, even my grandma and grandpa had been teachers. I told them that I grew up right here in our city playing teacher with my stuffed animals in the basement. I sensed that several of the children also played teacher at home. I told them how I graduated from high school and went on to a place called university where I

began studying to be a teacher. I told them that I even learned to be a teacher right here at our school across the hall. This completely amazed the class. I told them the places I taught and how I ended up right in front of them. Before I knew it the bell rang . . . I ended with another wonder . . . “I wonder how you got here?” And with a quick goodbye song they were on their way home. I wonder what will happen tomorrow?

Wednesday, May 14, 2008

It worked! Today during our morning carpet time I brought out a few pictures of me in Grade 1 that I had found the night before and shared them with the class. I told the class that I had been thinking about how we ended up in the same classroom and I thought we could write a story about it. I had already lost 1/2 a week. I hoped they bought into the idea or I was back at the beginning of this assignment!

After an hour of sharing stories and talking about what we might do, we had our action plan. We were going to write a class story. We would each have a page in our book to tell the story of how we ended up in the classroom. I would take a picture, not just a small picture, but a really, really big picture of each child for his or her page. They also wanted to bring in pictures like I did to share with the class. The biggest discussion happened when they all wanted a book to take home. The solution was to turn the book into a Photostory so each student could have a copy to take home. I should probably stop writing in my journal and write the note to the families so they know what we are up to and how they can help.

Thursday, May 15, 2008

Today I met with the students and went over the note explaining our project to their families. The note explained that we were making a class story and we needed about five pictures which told the story of how each child arrived in our classroom, and I also included a story frame to help each child remember his or her story. I felt the students were very excited about the project and seemed to be excited about bringing pictures in to share.

Friday, May 23, 2008

The first pictures began arriving today. The students seemed so excited to share them. The children who had not had time or had forgotten appeared to be enjoying the stories of their classmates. After singing *O Canada*, I was watching the students place their photographs into the “notes” bin. And before I knew it I was rushing over to stop the disaster that was about to unfold. I realized that many of the children had photos with no names on them and no envelopes! I am so glad I caught it when I did. I wasn’t prepared for that one! A few Ziploc baggies later and a few questions like “Is this you when you were a baby?” and we were all sorted out. Thankfully, it was only a few students who brought pictures on the first day.

Monday, May 26, 2008

It became apparent that I needed to set up a time to share. The students constantly gathered by the picture bin to show their pictures and tell their stories. I began the slow process of scanning all of the pictures and importing them into the program Photostory 3, which is a really simple program that allows the user to record voice and create movement over photos to produce a movie. I realized scanning and importing the photos was going to take much longer than I thought. I should have asked families for digital files if they had them. One of the educational assistants helped out today and has offered to scan more during the lunch hour. I am hoping that will help. Today I managed to take the individual student photos for the class story. It was a beautiful day so we went out to the play structure to take the photographs for the book. The pictures turned out great. I felt the students had lots of fun picking the locations and the poses for their photographs. I am off to print the photos. I think an 8 x 10 photograph should be large enough for the students' really, really, really big photo request!

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

I am really feeling the pressure of time as the complexities of this project are growing! The photos are taking forever to scan in. Everything seems so rushed. But the story frames are proving to be quite useful. I can tell the students have talked to their families about their stories by the time we talk about it at school. There is no way to help them individually, especially the EAL students who are learning English. I have been

working with students one at a time to type each story into our book. Ideally, I would have had students writing their own drafts, but this project has a timeline! I finished almost all of the students' written stories today. After working with each of them it makes sense to use the written version of their story to help them tell the digital version in Photostory 3. I may have to recruit an EA to help the students record their stories into our movie.

Friday, May 30, 2008

Time seems to be moving forward at twice the speed. All of the students' written stories are completed! Yeah! I am still waiting for photos from a few families and there are about five students who need to finish recording their digital story. Today I made the background pages for the book. I wanted the students to create them but by lunch when I had not started it became impossible to manage it in the afternoon. I made the backgrounds out of watercolour paper and food colouring. The pages turned out bright and colourful. The students did pick their colours but it would have been nice if they had created it on their own. I think I might print their stories on overhead so the colourful pages are visible underneath the stories. This weekend I need to get it coiled at the printer. It will look more polished and should hold up to the students' handling it a bit better.

Tuesday, June 3, 2008

Today it was crunch time. The three remaining students who needed to record their stories each had 8 minutes to get the job done! During the final moments of the morning, I gathered the students to the carpet and we sang our goodbye song to add an ending to our Photostory movie. It seemed like the perfect way to end *Our Class Story*. Tomorrow the parents are coming to our red carpet event where students will show the movie to their families as a group presentation. It really came together nicely and I sensed how powerful the stories were as a collection when we watched it as a class. I enjoyed watching the students laugh at each other's baby photos and gasp at their classmates' stories. As the students watched the movie, I became aware of how they really missed out on some of the opportunities to share their stories with the class. We ended up watching the movie twice. Watching your life story play as a movie is powerful and exciting when you are only 6 years old!

Wednesday, June 4, 2008

I did not expect the movie to have the impact that it did. The students wanted to watch the movie again this morning and this afternoon. Clearly, they are proud of their project. The invitations created by the students were helpful in letting parents know about our event. As our big day began we planned our event and prepared for our after school showing of the movie. The plan was for the students to sit on the gym benches and set up chairs for their families behind the benches. I encouraged them to figure out

how we would introduce the movie and our project. With me in the lead, the students figured out how to explain the project, show the book, and thank their families for helping them.

That afternoon, I sat back and watched the movie unfold before me. It took on a life of its own. The parents sat with their children as a family, not separately as the children had planned. Families spread out across the chairs and benches. It seemed a natural fit for the project. I could see pride on the faces of parents and tears in some of their eyes. This was powerful. At the end of our movie some of the families stood and gave their children a standing ovation. I could see how proud each parent was of their child. This project was more than a showcase of our accomplishments. It was a reflection of the lives we were living alongside each other.

Thursday, June 5, 2008

I had no idea our movie and book would change how I relate to parents or how parents relate to each other, but today I saw changes in the families as they collected their children after school. When I opened the door at 3:30 to send the students into the hallway, parents were finally talking to each other. It is June! All year they have stood outside the classroom door silently waiting to pick up their children, but today was different. I can't help but wonder if knowing a little bit more about each other had helped them realize that they are not alone. An unexpected outcome was the openness that families felt in sharing more about their children. It was hard for me to listen to the

stories of the children in my room. I was unaware of many of the challenges moving to a new country had created for families with young children. As I listened to the stories I connected to the families in a different way. In several instances knowing more about the children's experience prior to being in my classroom helped me to understand and plan more effectively. I thought I knew my students really well. Apparently not. I wondered if I could have done more throughout the year if I had known how to support the families as they settled into their new home. It seemed as though this opportunity for students to share about their experiences was in fact a relief because it opened conversations for students to share their experience and allowed them to talk about their experiences as a family. I can't help but wonder what would have happened if this project had been done in the fall instead of at the end of the school year. As I move forward I will make time to listen more carefully and pay attention to the lives of my students.

Saturday, June 7, 2008

I am so thankful for what driving out to Altona has done for me. I will miss my rural friends that I met, but I know I won't miss the drive! There is something satisfying about the final class of a course. Not that it is over, but the sharing and collaborative thinking that is wrapped up through reflection and conversation with colleagues has been invaluable. Today we all shared our final course projects. I shared parts of *Our Class Story* and talked about the project with the group. It was not until I was asked about the classroom make up that I realized how truly diverse my Grade 1 classroom was. There

were 23 students, six of whom arrived from countries other than Canada, and collectively nine different languages were spoken in addition to English! Incredible! So when I was asked “Would you do this again and what would you change?” I knew the answer right away. “Yes, I would do this again and I had lots of things I would change.”

Teaching Journal Two: Broadening the Experience

September 2008–January 2009

Tuesday, August 26, 2008

I just put the final touches on the classroom to ready it for the first day of school. I love the fresh start that each year brings. It won't be long before we are in the full swing of the school year. I am excited about creating a new class story with this year's class. I am looking forward to not having the time constraints that last year's story did when I started in May. I am still in the process of planning for our story and I am hoping to have the final project completed by November to share with families during student-led conferences.

This year I am going to use the story frame that I used last year. It seemed to work well for children. The frame appeared to have helped the students talk with their families about where they were born, where they had lived, places they had traveled to, the different languages they spoke, and the important people in their lives. I think it worked well for both the children who were born in Canada and the EAL students who have arrived in Canada.

Another idea I have for this year is to have students create personal museums. I came across this method while I was looking through the curriculum. I am really excited about having students create a display of the important memories of their lives. I am hoping it will provide the additional sharing time that the students seemed to desperately want last year. I should also prepare students to write their stories.

Tuesday, September 23, 2008

Today I called the students to the meeting carpet and we collectively pondered how we all ended up here together in one room. It worked for me last year, so why change it this year? The students seemed very interested in hearing about my story of how I came to the classroom to be their teacher. I tell all sorts of stories to the students, but as I am writing this, I am realizing I usually don't share much about me. When I entered the teaching profession I was given the advice to keep your private life exactly that—private. As I am supporting students as they record their personal journeys to our room, I realize that not opening up myself to the process in some ways really places me in the role of an outsider. I really valued the deeper connections which came from this project last year. I think opening up myself to the process will help the students and also the families as we journey throughout the year together. At the end of the day I sent the students home with the same wonder: how did you arrive in this classroom?

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

The bell rang and in poured the students with stories to share. After we sang *O Canada* and gathered on the carpet, several of the students wanted to share and we all listened. Sometimes I think 5- and 6-year-olds could spend an entire day telling stories! I planned on going over our note for families at the end of the day, but I shifted my plans and followed the students' lead to do it right away. As I shared the note and story frame we had a great discussion around plans for their projects. It was a bit of a challenge explaining what a personal museum was. I realized many of the students had never been to a museum. So after looking at websites for different museums we began to list things that we might put in our personal museum. They had no problem filling the list. The students suggested: photos, medals, trophies, flags, Pokemon cards, and toys. And they figured out on their own they could include a small piece that represented something too big to share at school like a picture of a bike to show that the student can ride a two wheel bicycle. I was impressed!

In the afternoon, we began decorating our boxes for our personal museums. I was lucky to find these great wooden boxes with lids, a bit smaller than a shoe box, at the local dollar store. All the students had lots of fun painting, drawing, and decorating a box that represented them. I watched students draw self portraits, pictures of their family members, and favourite places which the EAL students had visited in their homeland. The students really worked hard to create a box that would hold the stories and treasures of their lives. The final step was to put on a coat of Mod Podge to make each box shine.

With the explanation letter for their families tucked inside, the students left for home to fill their boxes with treasures! I gave the students one rule: what they bring needs to fit in the box.

Friday, October 10, 2008

The last museum finally arrived! Yeah! Today we started sharing our personal museums and I was exhausted! What began as a planned 60 minutes of sharing early in the morning spilled over into a good portion of the day. I wanted to structure the sharing in a way that had students repeatedly telling their stories so they had already rehearsed them numerous times before they began to write them down. We began by working in pairs and sharing our top three objects in our boxes. It was informative and powerful for me to see which objects the students selected from their boxes of treasures. When they next switched partners, I noticed that some children stayed with the same three items while others switched to share different items.

I really enjoyed watching the children share their museums with each guest that arrived. As I moved around the room I heard the same stories being told over and over by the students as new visitors arrived to look at their museums. I listened and heard about all the places the children came from, watched as flags, photos, and objects told the stories of the students' experiences prior to being in Grade 1. This format worked really well. The children only had one or two visitors at a time. Everyone had an opportunity to share, even the EAL students. The objects and pictures told the story when English

could not. It was funny to think young children would stop after sharing just three items. With each new visitor that arrived at a museum, the process began again, telling, rehearsing, and refining the stories. As I watched the students I realized that these objects were carefully packed and treasured by each child. They were brought to share and held the memories and stories of their past. The classroom was busy, loud, and full of life. As I took in the experience I knew that all of the students, including EAL and those who spoke English, were focused on sharing, talking, and communicating about their museums.

After meeting with several partners, students began setting up their museums on placemats. This worked beautifully to set boundaries so everyone had enough space. As I wandered around the room I noticed that students took a great deal of care as they set up each museum. Students moved their objects and photos around. They leaned over and began telling the stories that went along with their objects quite easily.

I found it useful to hang back and listen in to the conversations that were happening between students. It was amazing what came up when children began to share about themselves in a way that they saw as safe. As I wandered, I overheard many conversations. I discovered EAL students who had immediate family living half way around the world as well as children who were learning to speak in their mother tongue from their aunts and grandparents. I realized that I still had much to learn about my students.

The students were so engaged in the sharing that the first part of the morning flew by. They were heading out for recess before I knew it. I realized the children needed more time during the day to share. After morning recess, we had time for a small sharing session before they left for gym. For this sharing session, I divided the class into two groups. The first group of children was our guests at the museum and could walk around and visit the displays. The other half of the students played the role of tour guide and answered questions about their displays. I noticed that the roles which the students held supported them as they either talked about their museums or as they asked questions. Too soon it was time for lunch.

I switched around my plans for the day and we continued our process. After lunch, the students exchanged roles and the process continued. As I watched the students dramatize their museum tours, I realized that we, teacher and student, were approaching this process very differently. I saw the experience as academic. I was scaffolding the experience so that the students would be able to take their practiced stories and begin the more challenging part for us all. The EAL students had the additional task of working in a new language. As I watched the students navigate through the tables of personal museums on display I saw children playing with the toys and treasures of their lives. The students probably viewed the experience as play. They were relaxed and sharing the stories of their experience with the language that they knew. Listening in to the stories and conversations it became apparent to me how socially invested they were in each other's treasures and tales.

The momentum of our museums continued to take over the day. Our Grade 6 buddies joined us in the afternoon. This extension supported the students as they were getting to know each other and help at the same time by labeling objects for the Grade 1s, which would then support them as they wrote about their museums. I immediately noticed a shift in the conversations as Grade 1s shared their stories. The older children seemed to inquire deeper into the journey their buddies had taken because they understood what the Grade 1 students were doing prior to joining them. The Grade 6 students had prepared questions and talked about how they might support the Grade 1s. I am hoping the conversations my students had with their older buddies today will help them record their own stories next week. I can't wait to read them.

Tuesday October 14, 2008

Today we began the process of writing about our museums. The students struggled. I struggled. And then we quit for the day. I think I misjudged how prepared the students were for the writing process. I really felt they previously had lots of time to share and show their museums. Each student had a personal dictionary and we rehearsed the writing process as a class on the carpet. Looking back, I see we were missing a few steps. First and most importantly, I needed to identify the purpose for writing about our museums. Second, I needed a structure and a writing frame to help students who required or wanted the support. After all, they are only 5 years old and this is only our first month together!

Tomorrow I will try again with some new rules and a purpose. We will put our museums on display in the trophy case located outside the school office. This will provide us with an audience and a purpose. Many children are ready to form their own sentences, but some students still need a sentence frame, especially the EAL students learning English. Last week when the students were so keen, they saw their work as play. Today they saw their play becoming work. It can be challenging for a young child to write ideas down on paper. To help the children see the challenging task of writing as playful, I am going to turn the writing task into a seek-and-find game. The museums will be set up on display with clues to look for favourite items in them. For those who need additional support I will introduce the sentence frame “Can you see my _____?” For the students who are ready to write more, they can write a sentence which explains why they have included the item. Hopefully this will work. I think I will time the writing process to occur when a few extra adults are in the room too. I am also adding a new rule. Our museums will stay on the shelf and only one labelled item can come to your table spot at a time. Hopefully this will help students focus and not play with their treasures! My new goal for the week is for students to set up their museums on display and have their writing complete.

Friday, October 17, 2008

Wow, what a week! The museums are now on display in the trophy case. The students appeared to take up the challenge of writing much differently when they knew

their museums were going on display. I explained that the writing task was a “search and find” puzzle for their “museum guests.” This really seemed to motivate them in a different way. I also had the children writing as a whole class when we had lots of help in the room, not to mention the inclusion of using a writing frame. The sentence frame really helped the students highlight the items they wanted others to notice. I thought only a few would add a second sentence, but they all were motivated to do it. We ended up using the complete frame: “Can you see my hockey medal? I am a hockey player.” Of course the items and descriptions changed for each student. I found that the students who were ready wrote about all of their items and the students who needed a little more help wrote about three of their items. This was one of the most challenging tasks for my EAL students. Having the sentence frames and their items labeled supported them as they sounded out and recorded their ideas. I love reading Grade 1 writing, but not everyone can. So to prepare our writing for the display case I typed the exact spelling and words of the students. In some cases I provided the translation in brackets so everyone was able to figure it out.

Once our museums were ready I wanted students to have the opportunity to display the items in the way that was most important for them. I took small groups of children down to the display case together. The students were very focused and they took great care as they organized and made choices about where to place items. Conversations continued between the children as they worked, shared about the items, and gave advice to each other about where they should hang pictures and place items. While students

waited for others in the group to finish they asked questions about the objects and learned more about their classmates. It definitely was a meaningful process for us all. The students appeared proud of their museums and I was so proud of them!

Tuesday, October 21, 2008

I really enjoyed working with the students through their personal museums last week. They have only been in the hallway display case for a few days. I continuously see siblings, parents, and other students looking at the students' projects. The time spent working from "What is a museum?" to "Here is my personal museum." seems to have drawn the attention of many. I wonder if this interest from others is because as humans we are innately curious about the people around us and in our community.

Our next step as a class is to move forward and begin composing *Our Class Story*. I want to allow for more time and really slow down the process from last year when I only had a few weeks. While I was out walking this evening I began thinking about how I could change the experience from last year. I had this "ah-ha" moment of clarity. What does it mean to be Canadian? From there, my mind was off and running with all sorts of ideas and different directions in which I could take the students. In addition to having each student write about his/her journey to our room, we could also construct personal timelines and explore who we are as Canadians.

Well, with Halloween just around the corner, I still have some time to plan. I think our main focus in November will be: What it Means to Be Canadian. The first year

of *Our Class Story* was very rushed and I feel I missed opportunities with the students to explore who we were as a classroom community. I also want to integrate this project into the broader context of our Social Studies Curriculum. I will be able to address many of the outcomes in two of the provincial Social Studies clusters: I Belong and Connecting with Others. I hope to use these next 2 weeks for scanning photos into our Photostory project and gathering materials for our inquiry into what it means to be Canadian.

Monday, November 3, 2008

Today we began our inquiry into what it means to be Canadian. It was a great discussion. We discussed what makes us Canadian. I was not sure where the conversations would lead as I knew I had visiting EAL students, students who were waiting for citizenship, one student who just received citizenship, as well as many Canadian-born students. We talked about being born in Canada, moving to Canada, speaking English, and whether you could be more than one type of person. What I realized was that Grade 1 students are far more open to accepting others and embracing the idea of “being Canadian.” Our class discussions revolved around the idea that if you were born in Canada that makes you a Canadian; if you moved to Canada you could become Canadian; but if you believed it in your heart, you could be a Canadian too!

Friday, November 7, 2008

I have had many powerful conversations with the students this week. As we moved forward our inquiry has been renamed by the students “I am Canadian.” We are undertaking an investigation into ourselves to uncover what being a Canadian means. Today we discussed whether a person visiting Canada to learn English could be Canadian. And to think we would have the opportunity to address that question in a Grade 1 classroom! The conversation was detailed, in depth, and had a personal meaning to the children as some students were visiting Canada to improve their English skills. I was impressed by the reasoning and openness the students appeared to approach the subject with. Collectively the class seemed to agree that if you felt like a Canadian and lived in Canada, then you could be a Canadian too. I sensed that through our conversation the students became aware of the multiple roles individuals hold in the world.

As our conversation ended I extended the idea that we all hold multiple roles in our lives. I gave each student a paper to create a picture web representing the different roles that they individually filled. On my web, I drew pictures of my family, my husband, my cats, and pictures of me swimming, gardening, and reading. Around my pictures I wrote daughter, sister, wife, fur-mom, swimmer, gardener, and reader. I began to define who I was. In the middle of the web was a picture of me and the words “I am.”

Once the children completed their webs we gathered to share our webs and talk about them. Afterward, I gave the students 10 minutes to add any new ideas that surfaced

through our class sharing. I really felt these webs held a lot of information which could take us deeper into our inquiry into what it means to be Canadian. My next step was to meet with each student individually. Thankfully there are only 16 of us in the room. I talked with each student about his/her web and wrote in the words that he/she used to describe himself/herself, essentially creating individual word walls for students.

Thursday, November 13, 2008

As Remembrance Day came and went our conversations shifted from talking about who we are as Canadians to how the Canadian Military interacts with other countries in the world. We even had a visitor, a former student who is now in the military, come and talk about his experiences. This was really hard for me. I was unsure about his visit initially, but it was arranged by one of the families in the room. I thought back to my experience of the 2003 year-end picnic where a tank was brought onto the school grounds. I felt a huge amount of tension. I knew that today's visitor did not pose the same threat that a tank had engendered on the school grounds 10 years ago. I worried about my EAL students. As the conversation unfolded I began to slowly relax. The topics of the students' conversation spread to cover a variety of subjects. My concern for my EAL children was real. But after sharing a spider encased in glass to show the students how big the spiders were in the Middle East the dialogue changed. Many of the newcomer EAL children had seen similar spiders in their homelands; whereas, the Canadian-born students had a reaction that was a combination between amazement and

terror that a spider could be so big! The children seemed to relate to the stories of his boots melting, sand storms, and receiving cards of encouragement from last year's students. He left us with the gigantic spider which the students examined and studied for the rest of the year.

These additional experiences, which have resulted from our exploration of what it means to be Canadian, are providing opportunities for students to engage and have comparative conversations about their experiences. As students began to explore who they were, we looked at different parts that each of us performed. The children did a great job creating poems about the roles they filled in their lives. We were able to use our poems to write about who we were as Canadians. As the children worked on their poems, I realized my expectation of having the children write their own stories was too much, too soon. I really wanted the students to be the ones to record their stories. After our poetry writing, I am not sure that Grade 1 students are ready to write this story. But I know they can tell it.

Monday, November 17, 2008

Okay, I have embraced it. *Our Class Story* will not be ready for conferences this Friday. My hope was to finish both the book and movie for student-led conferences. I am not too worried because we have so much to share and show already. Our personal museums are still on display. We made a class quilt with clues. The personal timelines were still hanging in the hallway showing the important events of their lives. The

children wrote about what being Canadian meant. Each year I always forget how long projects take with young students. I am grateful that I have the luxury of time this year having started in the fall, so I don't feel the pressure of completing *Our Class Story* in a rush.

Tuesday, November 18, 2008

I've changed my mind! At home last night I glued in the 8 x 10 student pictures into the *Our Class Story* book. I am still hoping to have the book ready for conferences. It may be possible. To create the book this year, I went with something a little simpler: tag board cut into quarters. I coiled it at the printer's again, which really held up better than the coiling job I could do at school.

I really feel there has been a lot of lead up and conversations prior to writing each page in the book. I do not think I could prepare the students any better. Now it is time to engage and write while the students are just celebrating their inquiry into who they are and what makes us Canadian. After lots of reflecting last night I have become solid in my belief that it is the process of telling the story that is my focus, not the mechanics of writing. So my plan of approach keeps this in mind.

Today I sat with the children on the carpet. I shared last year's class story with them. I didn't read every page. I didn't have to. I was presenting an idea. I held up last year's *Our Class Story* and read the introduction. Then I began reading the opening sentence of each page. Each page had the same beginning: "Hello, my name is _____."

However, the word hello was written in the first language of each EAL or English speaking child. As I read the first sentence, the students wanted to know the different languages. They seemed to have this instant connection between last year's class and our own as they recognized faces and connected to the different languages shared. Of course when we reached pages written by siblings, we stopped and read the whole page. This seemed very exciting for the children. I put *Our Class Story* from last year on our big book easel and told the children that I would leave it out for them to look at it if they treasured the stories like they were their own. And they did.

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

The following day, as we gathered for carpet time, I brought the empty *Our Class Story* book we would use to hold our stories. After prompting students with a review of last year's story I held up our book. We began looking through it. The cover photo was in place but when we opened the book there was a sticky note that said, "write introduction here." As we turned the pages it became very exciting. Each new page revealed the face of another classmate. The students began predicting who was next as I gave clues about whose photo was on the next page.

The students seemed very eager to fill the book with their stories, but they also were a little anxious about the writing as I had expected them to be. I explained that over the next few days they would work with an adult, either myself, our teacher candidate, or an educational assistant, to tell their stories. By the end of the day we were more than

half done. Tonight I will type them out and I think that I will read each child his or her story to make sure it is just right.

Thursday, November 20, 2008

I am exhausted. We didn't completely finish our book for our student-led conferences this evening, but the students wanted to have what was completed on display for families to review our story as it was evolving. I was not going to share our progress until it was finished but the children really wanted to show their families. The students and I are engaging in this process in different ways. I valued the students' opinions and desire to share. Two children wrote out a letter to families telling them they could look at our book, but we still needed to put the finishing touches on it. The families seemed very excited to see the progress. And the children whose stories were not glued in yet explained what they had done to create their story. It didn't seem to matter to the students or the families that we didn't finish telling the stories. I am hopeful that *Our Class Story* will be completed by the middle of next week. After an evening of student-led conferences, I am off to bed.

Tuesday, November 25, 2008

It is done. Today we read our book from start to finish. The students sat like statues on the carpet listening to the stories of their peers. The students seemed really interested in the different ways to say hello and greet others. Several of the students

whose first language is English opted to open their story with a greeting in another language. I am excited about the awareness the students now have for the many different languages in our classroom and in our school.

As I read the individual stories to the class, I became aware of the transitions and culture/climate shock which many of the students have encountered even as young children. I have always considered young children to be incredibly resilient. But, as I read the stories, I sensed how they overcame human struggles, how they experienced excitement, and how they maintained a family connectedness. I felt these stories needed to be shared with families too, so our next step would be to turn our story into a movie using the Photostory computer program.

Wednesday, November 26, 2008

I thought the students might become tired after creating *Our Class Story: The Book*, but no . . . they are ready to move forward and create *Our Class Story: The Movie* based on their stories. Having the whole month of November to import the photos gave me plenty of time to prepare for this next movie project.

We started by watching the movie from the previous year. We even invited the Grade 2 class to come and watch it again with us. After all, it was their story. As the Grade 2 students gathered in our room to watch, I could see pride and excitement on each of their faces. It had been several months since we watched *Our Class Story* from last year. But at the end, I heard the usual requests to watch it again. I was ready this time. I

had counted on them asking me this. This time the Grade 1 students had to look for something the previous students had done well. And the Grade 2 students had to critique themselves and think of one thing they could have done even better. At the end of our second showing and discussion we had a list of criteria of what the Grade 1 students this year needed to do. Revisiting last year's story not only supported the Grade 1s as they took on a similar project, but it also introduced them to the Grade 2 students.

The students seemed genuinely interested in the languages they heard and had no trouble making connections among themselves. The photographs in the movie prompted memories and supported connections among students. Seeing the connections of familiarity form before me was exciting. I know the sense of relief I have when I am in a new place and I find a connection between someone else. Knowing I am not alone is important to me too.

Monday, December 1, 2008

I am thankful to have a teacher candidate in the room this month. Not only do our collegial conversations further my thinking, but the additional hands-on support is beneficial to the students. Today I met with the teacher candidate in my room and we created a plan to record the stories. I am going to purchase a Blue Snowball microphone which, according to our computer support teacher, should pick up even the quietest of voices. Over the next month in computer class one of us will work with students in the

room to record each story into our class Photostory movie. This will hopefully go a lot smoother than the rushed panic of last year!

Tuesday, December 16, 2008

We have been working hard on *Our Class Story* among all of the classroom demands of December. Each student has now recorded a story to go with the pictures which were brought from home. I learned that it was really hard to place a limit on the number of pictures students could have in the movie. I realized my rules had to be flexible. My original plan of using five pictures for each student seemed like a good idea until I began working with children who had lived in multiple countries. I ended up not putting limits on the number of pictures. Instead I let each individual experience guide how long and how many photos. Using the story written from the book seemed the best way to support students as they recorded their stories for the movie. In the end there were no rules. Each child was able to share his or her story. Ensuring everyone had the same amount of photos was not important. Capturing each student's story was the important part.

Our Class Story: The Movie is almost finished now. We just need to decide as a class on the ending. I think a January debut is in order. We are all too tired this last week of school in December to complete such a big project.

Wednesday, January 14, 2009

We finished! Hip hip hooray! Today we watched the final movie entitled *Our Class Story: The Movie 2008–2009*. As I watched the movie the first time, my focus was on the mechanics of our process. I noticed the difference in the microphone. I noticed children slowing down their words and speaking clearly (advice from last year's students). But as I continued to watch I became as focused as the students. I listened to the stories of 18 students, four of whom arrived in Canada from other countries. As I watched the movie I counted nine other languages in addition to English spoken by the students. The combined collection of stories was moving as I listened to story after story of how we became a class. At the end, they clapped and asked to watch it again. Not once did I have to remind anyone to stop talking and watch the movie. Every student seemed to listen with purpose and intent to the stories of their peers.

After recess, we made our plans to share the movie with our families. This year's class decided they wanted to invite the whole school. So, we set to work creating our assembly to premier *Our Class Story: The Movie*. With a few dates in mind we scheduled an assembly with the principal, made invitations for our families, and prepared our speakers to introduce our movie and tell just a little bit about how we put it all together.

Wednesday, January 28, 2009

As we gathered this afternoon to share *Our Class Story: The Movie*, the students buzzed with excitement. We invited the school to meet us in the gym after lunch. I became aware of how important that audience was until the children were bouncing with anticipation of our assembly. The students had worked hard to collect their treasures, pictures, and photographs, and to share their journey to our school with our school community. Many of our families were gathering outside our door to take part in our assembly. Our chosen speakers, with their sentence card in hand, practiced their line and prepared to stand up in front of the whole school and tell a piece of our journey as a class. Our principal welcomed our students and our families to start and then turned over the microphone to the Grade 1s. I sensed their nervousness as they each stood, some up on their tippy-toes, pulling down on the mic to speak each line into the microphone. The older children patiently watched as the Grade 1s explained how they created the movie. At last the lights dimmed. I took up my position at the computer. As each child's pictures moved across the screen and a tentative voice filled the gym, there was complete silence. It was moving. It was exciting. It was powerful. I sat in the perfect spot. I could see both the movie as well as each child as the story was on the screen. Interestingly they all seemed to have different emotions, some hid their faces while others beamed and held their thumbs to their chests to say that's me! Our audience was not completely silent. They ahhhed at the adorable baby pictures, whispered "me too" to friends beside them, and even laughed alongside the Grade 1s.

Thursday, January 29, 2009

The day after our assembly I could still feel the impact of it when the students walked through the halls. They received so many compliments from the older children. I also heard the stories of students who wanted to share similar experiences. The different teachers on staff stopped in with compliments and some even shared how they ended up as teachers in our school. Understanding who we are as a community of learners helps us to become better listeners and teachers. I really felt part of a community today and I think my students did too. As this year's story comes to an end the collaborative process and experience will stay with us throughout the year.

Teaching Journal Three: Living With/in Tensions

November 2009–March 2010

Tuesday, November 3, 2009

I am at it again. It is funny. I often get tired of repeating the same project year after year, but I do not feel the same way with *Our Class Story*. Each year it is always a little bit different. I am now working on the third year of the project and it still feels like a perfect way to get to know students. This year I have 16 students, from six different countries, and collectively they speak 10 different languages. Engaging with the students in *Our Class Story* seems to allow me time to learn so much more about the students, which in turn helps me to support their needs as they are learning English.

There has also been a shift in my thinking as a classroom teacher, first recognizing and then applying the new knowledge I have gained as a graduate student. I am looking at the students, the classroom, and the process through a new lens, one coloured by the academic journals I am reading and the conversations I am participating in with my graduate colleagues at the university. Applying the theory I am learning as a student to the real world of my classroom has been exciting, motivating, and inspiring. It is inspiring because I have discovered that I do have something to share. For the past 2 years I know what a difference *Our Class Story* has made for me. As I move forward, I know I will be thinking differently as I write and reflect on my work with EAL students.

Wednesday, November 4, 2009

Our Class Story is always a little bit different each year because the people change within the space of our classroom. I too have grown over time. My biggest change is my plan to enter into the process with my students. I usually participate from a role-modeling position. In previous years my personal museum has always been filled with the first five items I can grab from around the classroom. This year will be different. I am going to make an honest effort to participate in the personal museum and movie. We will see how it goes!

Friday, November 6, 2009

Today I shared my personal museum. I gathered my objects at home last night. It was surprisingly hard to find items I wanted to share about myself. I ended up using lots of photos of my family. Choosing the photos was also difficult. I was really putting myself out there. I wanted the students to be able to relate to me through my pictures, but I also found myself guarding my experiences. I kept asking myself, “Do I want my students to know that?” It was really, really hard. It didn’t help that my husband was getting involved. He asked, “Are you sure you want your students’ families to see that picture?” I realized it wasn’t just me I was sharing with the students. It was my whole family in some ways. I wondered if my students’ families had the same tensions?

In the end, I did finish putting together my personal museum. I selected a picture of me as a baby, another photo of me playing at age four in a sandbox with my brother and sister, a photo of me with my grandmother, a picture of me in Grade 1, a photo of my cats, a picture of my mom and dad with me at one of my university convocations, and one of my husband and me on our wedding day. I put a pencil in my box because it meant many things to me: I love going to school, writing, and being a teacher. I also put in my swimming goggles, a package of pumpkin seeds, and a measuring spoon.

As I shared my museum it felt a little more real. I was sharing and telling stories about me. In previous years I just made it up as I went along. It felt strange to open up and share about my personal life apart from my students, but it felt comfortable at the same time. I was sharing where I came from and how I ended up as the teacher in the

classroom with them. I passed the photos around; the students listened and asked questions. I answered them. In the end it wasn't as scary as I thought it would be. What I find most enlightening are the emotions I had while sharing—fear and hesitation. I wonder how my students feel about sharing parts of their lives? Do they have the same qualms? Do their families? I wonder if they have stories they want to keep secret?

Monday, November 9, 2009

During this past week, we have been working hard on our museums and getting them ready for the display case in front of the office. We have done lots of talking about what countries we were born in and where we lived before coming to our class. Essentially, we were really getting to know each other and talking about our similarities and differences. But, today I found myself at a loss for words, which doesn't happen very often in my classroom. I pretty much expect any student to say anything, at anytime, in Grade 1!

It happened during our story time. We were reading *The Alphabet Tree* by Leo Lionni (1968). The story is about the power of words and how our words can carry messages of peace. It is one of my favourite books to read because it is a natural way for my students to talk about peace in a safe setting. After I read the story, the students were making connections and sharing their ideas. Our conversation shifted when a comment was made about skin colour and wars. The room went eerily silent with all eyes focused on me waiting to see what I would do. I stared back at my very multicultural class. I saw

16 students who spoke 10 different languages and who came from all over the world. Where did this idea come from? I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. Suddenly I was unprepared for the conversation that would have to follow. This lesson seemed to take a sharp turn into uncharted waters and I was a little panicked. My first instinct was to get mad and resort to teacher lecture mode. Then I realized that I was sitting in a room full of 6-years-olds. Instead of shutting down our conversation, I shaped our discussion to work through some pretty big ideas for Grade 1s. It was a hard discussion to manage because many children wanted to speak. Our conversation centered around conflicts in children's homelands, skin colour, and the purpose of war. As much as I wanted to avoid this topic, it seemed the children wanted to confront it head on. After today's event I also feel that there is a need to continue the work we are doing as a class, inquiring into our stories and making connections with each other.

Wednesday, November 25, 2009

We have been very busy during the last month learning about each other and sharing our experiences. I have continued our discussions around skin colour. We have done lots of talking and sharing about ourselves and how we have lots of similarities even though we are all uniquely different. There is still more work to do, but every little conversation helps, I believe. Tomorrow night at our student-led conferences, the children will have lots to share. As a class, we have spent a lot of time talking about who we are and where we come from. The students will be sharing our felt quilt (a collection

of individual self portraits) they made as a class, the timelines showing important milestones in their lives, and written poetry around the different relationships and interests that they have. To support the students in meaningful conversations with parents, I have prepared a photo sheet of the different projects and displays the students will visit with their parents. At the different projects, I have hung questions to help the parents talk to their children about what they learned or how they completed their projects. For those parents who are just beginning to learn English, I am hoping that the Photo Sheet will be a guide for the children and a user-friendly way for the parents to help their children navigate through the room and ensure they are not missing anything. My hope is that even without knowing English the parents can help their child share and talk about the learning that has taken place in the room, as students have been encouraged to share by using their first language.

Friday, November 27, 2009

The students did a great job sharing their work with their families last night. *Our Class Story: The Book* is moving forward. Our next step will be to write our stories. I am going to have students pack up their personal museums next week.

Today there were no classes for students. The day was busy with a few family meetings in the morning and packing up and getting ready for a new inquiry in the afternoon. Following our work on telling stories, it seems like a natural progression to move into a Fairy Tale theme next and see where the students take it. I have gathered lots

of dual language fairy tales and different versions of fairy tales from other countries. I am curious to see what piques the students' interest.

Monday, November 30, 2009

I am glad the pressure of conducting the student-led conferences has passed. Today I made time to sit back and watch the children as they had choice time and worked in the classroom. I was able to listen in to several conversations and I realized that the work on *Our Class Story* was still resonating throughout our classroom web. The students were still making connections in their play to the experiences we lived together writing *Our Class Story*. As some of the conversations became more expressive and loud I questioned when and if I should intervene. It is not very often that I am able to sit as the observer and watch without interference in the Grade 1 room. I learned today that my students were paying attention to the lives of others. I think that this was perhaps something I was working toward and didn't even know it.

I have never taught such a diverse class. Each year there are always more languages represented in my classroom. I am learning that each student enters our classroom with his/her own unique suitcase packed for our journey together. As we look into these suitcases and learn about each other's lives the conversations lead to connections between the students and we are building a classroom community. This happens because we have stopped, listened, and shared our stories. I could see that the children had invested in their conversations because it was about their experiences, their

living environments, and their families. I believe these conversations I was witnessing would not have happened if they had not had many opportunities to share past life experiences through their photos, museums, and stories with their peers. There was an emotional underpinning which allowed the learning of English to stick. Watching the students communicate with each other in a social setting, I realized that this had allowed them to find similarities and deeper connections when on the surface there appeared to be none. When we all engage in similar storytelling, we enter into a comfortable parallel process to branch out and talk about events with family at home, then come to school and share new ideas with new friends. I think tomorrow we will take time to revisit our photos. Instead of focusing on the people in the pictures, I will have the students be detectives and look into the backgrounds of the photographs to see what else they can share and discover about each other.

Wednesday, January 13, 2010

The busy holiday season has passed and we have re-established our classroom routines in the new year. We are back into the swing of things and on a roll with writing our stories for *Our Class Story*. The students are doing a great job of sharing their journeys with each other. I am finding the story frames students have filled out with their families really helpful. I am able to support the student when he or she doesn't know what to say next. It allows me to ask questions and support their thinking as they choose

what they want to share. I think it also allows their families to have a part in our collaborative writing too, just like what my husband did when I was preparing to share.

About a week ago, we read *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2003). It is a story about a young girl as she wonders about whether she should choose an English name or keep her Korean name. I sensed it was a particularly meaningful story for some of my students as they had experienced changing their names. As a result we have talked lots about our names. Throughout my teaching experience I have discovered that some children prefer to be called a mixture of their Canadian and given names, others insist on their given name when I speak to them, and still others want to use a Canadian name. I have learned that being flexible provides the most comfort for the students as they are learning a new language, about new school systems, and connecting with new Canadian peers.

The conversation around names surfaced again today as we composed the final individual pages for *Our Class Story: The Book*. As I was helping students put in the final stories into our book I needed to rethink, shift, and change my plans. I had encouraged children to begin their story in our book by saying hello and introducing themselves to the reader. Many children greeted the reader in their first language, followed by their name, and then shared their story. Clearly *The Name Jar* influenced many of the students' thinking and it surfaced as we were putting the final touches on our book. Students with two names, their birth name and their Canadian name, wanted a way to include both in our story.

In this moment I knew I had changed as a teacher. Five years ago I would have made a child feel good about what they wrote and the name they used and told them not to worry about it because it was just a book. Not now! *Our Class Story* has allowed me to connect in new ways to the students in the classroom. I tried to imagine and understand the conversation from the child's perspective and realized that the students were not trying to postpone our completion. They did not know about my self-imposed deadline. They simply wanted to express their story in their words using their names. Letting go of my idea and making space for the students' ideas was important to building a community of learners. I helped children revisit their stories and make space on their pages for them to write their birth name on the page. As the children practiced writing their names with smiles on their faces I felt that this small re-write was very important to these children. They were able to share how to write their birth names with their peers. I believe it meant a great deal to them. I helped a few other EAL children rewrite their pages to include both their Canadian names and their given names. I wondered if this was something we could explore further . . . telling the story of how we got our names?

Monday, February 8, 2010

Over the past month, the children have been hard at work telling the story of how they arrived in our classroom for *Our Class Story: The Movie*. My story was the last one to be included in the class movie. Today after school I spent one and a half hours composing and recording my story. I had the support of two student teachers to complete

my personal story and it was still really hard to do. The end result was 40 seconds of video with my voice over six carefully selected photographs. I had no idea how difficult it was to put my story into words. I kept recording over and over again to get it just right. I wanted it to be perfect. The whole school would see it at our assembly and it would also be in the video that each child would be taking home. Who knew that sharing your own story could be such a challenge? Perhaps I need to be a little more patient and careful as children tell their stories.

Wednesday, February 10, 2010

I am so glad that I had the opportunity to tell my story alongside the students. It has been very useful in helping me to understand students as they pause, ask to take a break, come back, and ask to change parts of their stories. In previous years I had told children when the project was finished that we were not making changes so I didn't have to go back and do the work. It did not seem awful at the time. In my mind we had moved past that part of the project and were on to new things. But now that I have had the opportunity to compose my own story I understand the need for the students to have time to reflect and make changes to their stories. I certainly needed extra time for reflection and revisions. Each year I learn something new. I will never forget this lesson.

My time today on *Our Class Story: The Movie* was spent going back and working with a few children who had been asking if they could change parts of their stories. So, we sat together at the computer and made the changes. They seemed minor to me, but I

sensed the relief as we worked through the changes. Working alongside students as they made several changes I finally understood and appreciated the process the students were moving through. We removed parts, put others back in, and retold entirely different stories. I sensed there was a great deal of emotion in these stories. I felt there was a cautionary resistance to making it difficult to choose the right stories to share. I understood the experience as I recalled enduring the same ambivalent process just a few days before. By the end of the day, we reached a place of peace with our stories and I had a much better understanding of the fragility of children's experiential disclosures.

Thursday, March 25, 2010

More than a month has passed, and at last the final touches have been put on our video. It was finally time to share today. As the school audience gathered in our gymnasium, I looked out at the little Grade 1s sitting so proudly in the front row about to share their stories with the school. One-by-one the children who wanted to introduce *Our Class Story: The Movie* walked up to the microphone and spoke their lines as loudly and as clearly as they could in English. A few of our EAL speakers were fluent in English while other children were just learning. And one of our speakers had just begun talking in class a month before. A smile came across my face as I watched our opening speaker welcome the school to our assembly and then dash to the safety of the first row where all the Grade 1s waited with anticipation.

As I sat in the gym and listened to the recorded voices of the Grade 1s carry throughout the room, it was their voices telling their stories. I know from experience that this is just the beginning. Their journeys will change as they grow and develop. As they learn more English they will probably retell their stories one day.

When our movie credits began and the children's voices came through the speakers singing our goodbye song, I heard the first little voice in the gym joining in to sing along. By the end of the song, many of the former students from my room, who were now in Grade 2 and Grade 3, joined in and sang along with the Grade 1s. It was a great feeling of community. As children returned to their classrooms, the Grade 2 and 3 classes from previous years were buzzing as they recalled their experiences with their own class stories.

Friday, March 26, 2010

Spring break is upon us. As I sit here in my empty classroom after school I feel as though I just need to write. When I return in April I am sure that much of this journey of writing and telling our stories as a class will be a blur and almost forgotten. Tonight as I look back at the stories shared in the gym during our assembly and reading through our book one more time, I notice that the voice of each student can really be heard as I read each page. Engaging in the process as a participant has shifted how I have approached this project this year. Instead of telling the children when their stories were done I made space for new ideas to emerge. It certainly added more time to our project completion,

but I felt it was really important to allow the student's voice to come through in the story. I did not edit in the same way as I had done in previous years. I left the words of the child as they were spoken. For this project it did not matter that their words were not grammatically correct. What mattered was hearing the child's voice as the story was told. The stories were read exactly how the child told them. This was what made the stories real. Changing the words would change the story.

As I begin to collect my thoughts for next year, I am left wondering about some of the un-travelled paths we did not explore this year. I am thinking about the possibilities of sharing the story of our names, exploring how text is recorded in other languages, and bridging out to our school community by strengthening our connections with our older literacy buddies in Grade 6. I see so much potential for where I may travel next year as we collect, retell, and share each story of how we come to be a classroom and a family of learners.

Journal Four: Forging New Paths

September 2010–June 2011

Monday, October 18, 2010

I am embracing the challenge of my fourth year of collaboratively writing *Our Class Story*. This project continues to grow in depth and in new direction each year. This year *Our Class Story* will become one part in a larger inquiry into who we are as Canadians. I have so many new ideas that I would like to try, many of which arose out of

the past three collaborative stories I worked on with the students. *Our Class Story*, both the book and the movie, have become just two parts of our journey into what it means to be Canadian. I find comfort knowing that *Our Class Story* is embedded in provincial curricula and has deeper connections which resonate across our classroom web throughout the year.

For this reason I am not setting the same completion goals for our story and movie this year. I would like the flexibility to follow the lead of students through an inquiry model so they can direct our journey of writing together. I see *Our Class Story*, both the movie and the book, lasting throughout the year. Our inquiry into what it means to be Canadian will be the entrance into this journey of collaborative writing. This means that the path we travel to complete *Our Class Story* (the book and the movie) will be much longer as I forge new paths of discovery with a new group of students. Guiding me will be my prior experiences and knowledge gained from years past and with the direction of this year's students leading the way. I created a similar space last year to discover the untravelled paths and it made a big difference in the depth of our project. Allowing time to explore in new directions provided us the opportunity to discover new things about each other and strengthen our classroom community. I wonder which previously un-travelled journeys we will try together this year.

Thursday, October 20, 2010

This year I have a new MacBook Pro. I have been taking lessons at the Apple store. Yesterday I had a session on iPhoto and learned how to create books, in particular, hard cover books. I was able to see a sample and then my mind began to run wild with the possibilities of what may come if I create *Our Class Story* using the Mac. During the session at the Apple store, I learned about the flexibility of the computer program iPhoto. I am excited by the idea that students will be able to choose their photos for the book while still keeping their originals intact. It will allow students to show several photos as well as tell their stories in our class book. I think this weekend I will work on creating my page to see how well this model may work in the classroom.

Sunday, October 23, 2010

Last year I discovered a lot about the emotions and challenges that arose out of sharing my journey with others that I worked with and whom I taught. Knowing how hard it was to tell my story for our Photostory movie, I have created a page for myself in our class book using iPhoto. I wanted to explore the possibility of publishing a hard cover book prior to introducing the idea to the class. It was much easier for me to write my story than to tell my story into a microphone for our movie. Selecting the pictures was easy; I relied on last year's selection. However, placement on the page was my new challenge. I had six photos that I could move around within the set frames of the template I was using. Once I settled on the placement of the photos I was able to write a

brief description below, which was the easiest part of the photo page. As I began writing my own story I did many edits, reminding myself of how I ended up here at school writing a class story with Grade 1s. At the same time I was writing my personal story I was also writing the story of my family. I needed to speak to my husband and pick up the phone to call my parents to find out what they thought as it was their story too. This is truly a collaborative project where many people are involved in the creative process of storytelling.

Now that I have finished writing one page I am pleased with the result. I think I will use this format this year and see how it works in a Grade 1 classroom. To speed the process along, I will add all the necessary pages and formatting before sitting down to work with children as they create and write their pages.

Tuesday, October 25, 2010

My awareness that I will be using the *Our Class Story* project for my graduate study work has me thinking in bigger ways! I just came home from the Apple store after a session on iMovie. I am a novice when it comes to Apple products so I have much to learn. Again the potentials of this program are incredible for *Our Class Story: The Movie*. The transitions and video animations of globes and maps will be useful in showing the distances travelled by the students.

I am pretty sure that I will be able to learn these two programs, iMovie and iPhoto, and use them to enhance our learning and showcase our project. The end result

will be the same, a book to add to the school library and a movie each child can take home to treasure with their families. The products will look different, but the process of getting there will remain parallel to years past. I still plan on introducing certain aspects of the project done before, but with what I have learned from my experiences over time our journey will take a course of its own.

Saturday, October 29, 2010

I have just finished webbing the possibilities for this year's project. This is so exciting as I anticipate the many possibilities for helping my EAL students participate in more meaningful ways. I am going to begin with our personal museums as in years past. Not only is this a recommended project in our curriculum guides, it also supports the newcomer EAL students who have very little English. Creating something physical by sharing objects with peers allows students to see and make connections without having to speak a word. The artistic component of painting and creating the museum box to hold their treasures has also proven to be a great opportunity for children to observe and talk about their interests and life experiences without focused criteria for the conversations. I am hoping to write about our museums as well as share them with the school in our display case. It is my hope as we are thinking about what it means to be Canadian that the children will be able to create a collaborative art piece as well as several individual pieces which express who they are.

Looking back to last year's experiences, I also hope to explore the importance of our names and how often behind the name there is a story, whispering and asking to be told. As with last year's story, I am sure new directions will open as we engage in our collaborative story writing. I think this is what I enjoy the most about working with young children in the classroom. I never know what my day will hold, what direction it will take, or the adventures we will find together. The best laid plans are the ones that are flexible to shift and change with the interests of the learners on the classroom landscape.

Tuesday, November 2, 2010

We began our inquiry into what it means to be Canadian today. I began by having the children create an individual picture web about all the different places they like to go, things they like to do, and special things about themselves. The children stayed very focused on their task. Some children asked to have a label put beside their pictures while others worked to sound out the beginning letters of the word. Some children did not want writing on their pages. Several of the EAL students asked to have the words scribed onto their page. These picture webs became the focus of our group discussion. The children gathered in a circle with their pages still and flat in front of them. This is a feat which requires a great deal of discipline in a Grade 1 room! I wrote in the center of our page: "We are Canadian." Then I asked the children to share what was on their pages. Slowly we filled up the entire poster paper with our interests, likes, and favourite things which represented how we were all diversely Canadian!

Later in the afternoon, we met as a class and discussed some of the possibilities of where we might go with our learning. I shared previous journeys which Grade 1s had taken. The children seemed eager to follow in the footsteps of students in years past. This year we will create personal museums, make a class quilt, create personal timelines, create our name story, and of course, write *Our Class Story: The Book* and produce *Our Class Story: The Movie*. I love how Grade 1s are so eager and want to do it all!

Monday, November 8, 2010

Over the past week the students painted and created their personal museum boxes. Last Thursday, November 4, the children took home their empty personal museum boxes with a note explaining how to fill it and the rules of what could go inside. The items would need to fit in the box and valuable items should be photographed or artistically recreated, not brought to school. I also included a mini-classroom newsletter with all of the projects we were going to engage in as a class. I would need the support of families and I preferred to ask the families at one time to gather, collect, and record ideas and stories with their children instead of asking every few days.

The students were very quick to return their personal museums, photos, and story guides for our projects. For this reason alone, I know how invested the families are in this process. The Story Guide allows students to first work through their ideas at home and it builds the lines of communication. Having parents record the stories in the Story Guide helps students prior to sharing and retelling their stories at school. Initially, I did

not fully see the importance of the family involvements, but as I wrote my own story, I needed my own family to be a part of the process. Interestingly, as I look back, all of the families returned their child's Story Guide, even though some parents were still learning English themselves. I do occasionally struggle with permission forms for field trips but this project has not had the same result. I am struck by the level of commitment from families as we engage in collaborative storytelling.

Tuesday, November 16, 2010

Last year's class taught me the importance of our names. I have many names: Mrs. Devlin, Kati, K. J., Kate, Kat, Katrina, and when my mother needs my attention, Katherine Jane! usually does the trick. What all of those names have in common is that they come from my given name. I have never been asked to pick another name, nor have I been called by a completely different name. Last year's class made me think differently about names and how I use them as a teacher. We didn't have time to share the stories of our names last year, but we do this year.

Friday, November 26, 2010

Over the past week the students asked their families the story of how they were named. Using Photostory, the children shared their story of how they got their names. Each child picked a baby picture to go along with his/her story. As I sat today and watched the movie which the Grade 1 students then completed on the stories of their

names, I was really moved by the histories and the amount of thought that had gone into choosing a name for a child. Children were named in honour of others, for favourite people and places, and by the meaning of names. Parents thought about initials, nicknames, and what their children looked like when they were born. So much thought went into choosing the perfect name. And yet, many of the EAL children selected new names when they arrived in Canada. Together as a class, we watched the movie and again it played at our student-led conferences for families to watch. The children knew where they were in the movie and I had shown them how to find their part so their families didn't have to watch the whole movie. Not one child needed to do this, however, as every parent sat and watched the whole movie. The response was very positive and powerful. Knowing more about where our names came from allowed others to understand more about our life experiences, people who touched our lives, and those who named us. I am curious to see how children will introduce themselves in our class movie and book. Will they choose their full name, their English name, or a shortened nick name?

Wednesday, December 8, 2010

Our personal museums are complete and on display in the hall outside the office. The Grade 1s have been hard at work writing and telling their stories for the movie and the book we are creating together. I have noticed that the older children in the building all stop to look at the Grade 1 museums on display. In particular, the students who

participated in the project when they were in Grade 1 gather quite regularly to look again and again. There is such a variety of museums to see, which have been created by 16 students who speak 11 different languages and who have come from 7 different countries. The contents of the museums are definitely unique and fascinating to look at and read about.

Each year as I engage in a class story project, previous students seem to take notice and share their memories with me about our experience together. I somehow feel that as a result of the work I have done connecting to each of the children, my relationship appears to extend beyond their Grade 1 year with me. I was questioned today by a group of former students wondering why they did not get to make personal museums. The simple answer I shared with them was that each year was different and that I liked to try new things. However, the real answer is far more complex than that. I am constantly in a state of learning new methods, ideas, and strategies to improve my practice. Each year I grow as an educator and so does the Grade 1 program in my classroom. Over time I am learning to slow down and value the process of the work and not focus heavily on the end product.

Wednesday, January 12, 2011

I am really starting to see how time moves very fast when you least expect it. Each year has its own unique challenges for me. After having surgery to remove my tonsils in September and recovering from pneumonia in December, I feel as though I am

running out of time and we have not even started the collaborative writing. Yet I value the connections I make with students during the making of *Our Class Story* and I could not imagine passing this project onto the replacement teacher during my extended absence. Now that we are back at school after the Christmas Break, my focus will be to get caught up on what I have missed and I'll begin supporting students as they write their stories.

Monday, February 7, 2011

Over the past month, the Grade 1 students have been focused on writing their stories for our book. Even though we are further into our school year, I have opted to type what each child dictates. I really hope to have the children write their own stories, but I find that telling seems more appropriate at this age for this project. The mechanics of writing seems to hinder their ideas and the telling of their stories. So, one-by-one over the past 6 weeks, I have carved away time to sit with each child and have him/her tell and write his/her story. It is working beautifully. The class story is able to move forward while we continue to learn about other subjects that interest the children. In this fourth year, I am using iPhoto to publish the book in hard cover, which means the photos and the words are being compiled at the same time. I am really impressed by the impact of having multiple pictures of each child on the opposite page of writing.

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

I am really enjoying spending time with each student in Grade 1 talking and sharing about their prior experiences. The photos are supportive to children as they talk about their families and journeys to our classroom. As I watched the children go through the selection process and placement process I remembered my own struggle to decide. I recalled choosing which pictures had to be in the book and where they would be placed on a page. I could imagine the students might have had some of those tough choices to make too. Each student I wrote with brought an entirely new perspective and experience. It was impressive to be a part of the process. I really felt that some students knew exactly what they wanted and really took control over their page while I saw other students who appeared more like myself in the process, hesitant, indecisive, and unsure about how to share their story.

Thursday February 10, 2010

My experience writing with each of the students had me considering what the children might feel or experience during the process of writing *Our Class Story: The Book* and producing *Our Class Story: The Movie*, so today I wanted to explore the room from a different perspective—that of the students. I began by taking pictures of the physical space to get a sense of how our room must feel to them. I took pictures at my eye level and then switched to taking photographs at their eye level. Wow! The room is certainly a different place when you are little. My experience within the classroom has

shifted when I begin to see the room in the way that the smaller Grade 1 students do. The room seems huge, tall, and big. As I looked back at the photos of the empty classroom, I was able to see representations of the children who worked within these walls. Their art, their portraits, and their stories were visible on our walls. I am not sure I would have thought about differences in perspectives. Thinking and questioning my practice as a researcher has created opportunities to explore my experience as a mainstream teacher of EAL Early Years students.

Sunday, February 13, 2011

I have been thinking about how the student's perspective is different than mine all weekend. I have awakened to the different approaches I take to teaching. I am left with a myriad of wonderings, for many of which I will never have answers. Simply being aware shifts who I am as a teacher and what I can offer the students in my classroom.

Last week I began comparing the physical differences viewed through my eyes and the eyes of my students, which has led me to a series of wonders about the EAL students in my classroom. How does the EAL student in the classroom perceive the environment? And how is it similar or different from the child's prior schooling experiences? Not only is the physical space contrasted, but so is the education. What does the EAL student pick up on when I teach? What messages am I sending to them with the choices that I make as a teacher? We all have parallel experiences from our past

lives that enter into the classroom with us. How do these experiences change our perspectives?

Monday, February 14, 2011

As a teacher, I always wonder what sticks with children and what gets lost or forgotten in the experiences of childhood. Funny, after a weekend of reflecting on what resonates with the students that I teach, I received a letter and a Valentine from a former EAL student and written inside were memories of *Our Class Story*. I shared the valentine with my students because the memories inside the card spoke fondly of the movie we created years before. This seemed to reignite their interest in *Our Class Story*. Just when I think interest is slowing down, the children show me they are really invested in our project. I let them all know that we would finish our book before creating the movie. This valentine is meaningful to me as I am realizing this work is important and making a difference. I am excited about the progress and expansion of our web. Clearly what is happening inside my classroom is vibrating outwards because I am feeling the vibrations as they resonate back onto the web within my classroom walls. *Our Class Story* has allowed the children to make connections with one another.

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Our classroom web is growing beyond our classroom door. I find myself more aware of the EAL students in our building. In my classroom I have always focused on

where the EAL child was academically, but through the collaborative writing process I have also now gained an understanding of the student's emotional development and social experiences, which allows me to design learning sequences that meet the needs of the whole child.

It is easy to forget that an EAL child speaks a different first language when he/she finally begins to feel confident in English and can't stop talking. I am reminded every day in my classroom as I watch children share and teach their peers different words in their first language. This is reinforced the moment I open my classroom door and hear Spanish, Tagalog, Korean, and Mandarin along with English spoken in the halls of our school. I have to remember that EAL children are developing two or more languages at the same time, English and the languages they spoke prior to entering school. The EAL children I teach still communicate about their day. I just have to look closer and be patient. The students may not be comfortable speaking English in the classroom, but I know they are picking up the language that surrounds them. When they are ready they will speak English, maybe in Kindergarten, or maybe when they record their story of how they have arrived in Grade 1. It is hard to remember that young children need space, time, and encouragement within a positive learning environment in order to learn an additional language.

Monday, February 21, 2011

Our inquiry into what it means to be Canadian came to an end in December, but *Our Class Story* has continued to carry on, written one page at a time. Each day I continue to work with children on their stories, some days more than others. As our stories vibrate across our classroom web, they are present on our classroom landscape throughout the year. Paying attention to the lives and stories of the children on a daily basis shifts the way I see other events unfolding in our classroom.

Today during book buddies with the Grade 5 and 6 students, the Grade 1 children shared their favourite books from home. The children were invited to bring their favourite books to share in honour of I Love to Read month. The invitation was open-ended. Over the weekend the children selected their favourite books to bring. The older children prepared a favourite part from one of their novels or they could bring a special picture book. The Grade 1 students were instructed to bring their favourite book to school and someone would read it with them. The energy level of bringing a book from home was high. As I watched the students today, they were really focused on their job to share their stories.

As I moved around the room listening to stories I was excited to see books written in languages other than English and students reading them! I am seeing the importance of honouring and valuing the child and ensuring they know their past journeys are welcome here.

Wednesday, February 23, 2011

I was really excited to see the children taking interest in the dual language books. The Grade 1s seemed to be interested in the different characters in the writing and curious about the unknown words. Sharing our books from home was a big success. Children were able to bring a piece of their world outside of the classroom into the school and share it with others. Through this invitation to bring a favourite book from home I learned a lot more about the students. I was able to see reading behaviours and skills in first languages that I did not see in the classroom.

Thursday, March 10, 2011

I am looking forward to the arrival of our teacher candidate working in the classroom this year. *Our Class Story* has lost its momentum because I am having a hard time finding time to work with the children individually. This time of year is always so busy with report cards, special days, and our Edu-fair. The students have grown so much since the last teaching block in December ended. I have just a few children remaining who need to sit with me and share their stories. I hope to finish the book and begin the movie while our teacher candidate is working in the classroom.

Wednesday, May 18, 2011

This year by taking an inquiry approach and following the students' lead, I have made much deeper connections to the children resulting in rich experiences together. I

am feeling anxious because of all the different directions in which we have ventured that may result in our movie being unfinished! The month of April was rich with an inquiry into the rainforest planned by our teacher candidate. So *Our Class Story: The Movie* was put on hold. However, with a second adult in the room, I did finish meeting with each of the children to create their pages in *Our Class Story: The Book*.

As we head into the final few weeks in Grade 1, the pressure is on to finish our movie. I have been working on loading the students' photographs into iMovie and laying out the sequence for the movie. I am using the same framework that we have used in previous years in Photostory, but this time the software program is iMovie instead. This new method will be a little more work, but I want to take advantage of the map feature, which will insert animations of a plane flying around a globe to represent a time where a child has travelled to a new country. Every child will have their own chapter in the movie. It will begin with the earliest photos they have provided and move chronologically up to a present day picture of the student in Grade 1. I must say, the story frames the families created with their children back in early November are certainly useful for this process.

I considered entering into this process of assembling the order of the photos with each child, but with June 30th fast approaching I went ahead with my plans. The beautiful thing about technology is that iMovie can shift, change, or move a photo at the click of a button. This has made it so easy to accommodate a child's need to tell the story in a certain way. With the click of a mouse, a simple change can be made. So I

continued to assemble the photos in the order that seemed to make sense, knowing I could change the sequence later. In addition, I added the globe animations for the children. When it came to labeling the place on the map, I left that up to the child. I wasn't sure if they would want to identify the city, town, or country that they moved from, so we would add that later when I could meet with each of them.

Tuesday, May 24, 2011

I took advantage of the long weekend and completed the beginning framework of our iMovie. I also recorded my portion of the movie for the students to see as an example. It was much easier the second time around. Too funny, it only took me about 20 minutes, much less than the 90 minutes it took me last year! I already had an idea of what I wanted to share. Now I just needed to get my voice to sound right.

Even with all of the progress that has been made I am still worried about finishing *Our Class Story* this year. June is a very busy month at our school for field trips, special days, and outings. I decided to bring the students into the conversation about my concern with not finishing in time to share our movie with the school. This was a shared story and I knew the children wanted to create the movie to share with their families and the school community. We met on the meeting carpet and I showed them the beginning part of their movie as well as my story. Instead of taking the time to explain to each child individually what we would do together when we met, I talked to the whole class at once. I guess I am getting better in some ways managing my time on a big project like this.

Once the students saw their movie taking shape, the motivation was re-ignited and the children were excited to begin recording their words. I believe the Grade 1s sensed my worry of not finishing our movie. I began working one-on-one with the children to capture their words, their stories, and their journeys to the Grade 1 classroom while the other children worked together and with a great deal of independence. Our movie really brought us together working toward a common goal: finish the movie before the end of the year.

Monday, June 20, 2011

We are in the final 2 weeks of classes. I had no intentions of leaving any of this until the last minute, but life happens, quite literally. For the past 3 weeks, I was ordered to take bed rest while my body adjusted to the idea of having a baby on board. Although I had many offers from very capable people to help finish the movie, I could not let them help. I needed to be a part of each child's story. This was our story and I wanted to see it through. I did accept help once I returned to the classroom. With the additional supports of an extra adult in the classroom we worked toward our final destination: a school assembly showcasing the Grade 1s.

The pressure is on, yet I need to remain relaxed and stress free due to my pregnancy. Easier said than done! I have three students remaining who need to record their stories. I am thinking I can do this! We can do this! I met with the principal today to select a date for the assembly. With only 7 teaching days remaining, we were running

out of time fast. I admitted defeat when I suggested that we cancel the assembly because it was so close to the end of the year. However, this was not an option. *Our Class Story* assembly was now anticipated by our school community! And despite all the challenges no one was going to let us fail in meeting our goal. We set the date as the last day of school. So with our date planned, I knew we had to finish. It meant a lot to everyone, not just to me.

Friday, June 24, 2011

We finished our movie today. I am so excited!!! All of the students have recorded their stories, with 3 days to spare! I am just left to export and prepare the movie for our assembly next Thursday. The children all made invitations for their parents to come and see our movie. The sense of relief that we have completed *Our Class Story: The Movie*, and published *Our Class Story: The Book*, is tremendous. This year with all of the different directions that this project has taken due to the students' lead, I didn't realize until now how overwhelming it has all been. I am looking forward to having the Grade 1s share their project on June 30th. We are in unanimous agreement. It was all worth it.

Thursday, June 30, 2011

The excitement and tension in the classroom seemed off the scale in here today! The students entered the classroom with the anticipation of sharing their movie, followed

by a Canada Day parade, knowing that it was our last day together in Grade 1. The emotions seemed high for us all. I arrived early today to set up our movie in the gymnasium where all of the students, staff, and families would gather for our assembly. I knew with the shorter morning and early dismissal that many families would arrive and stay the entire time. The Grade 1 speakers were ready with their cards to introduce our movie and we each knew our roles for the day.

As the school gathered in the hot and muggy gym on the last day of school, the Grade 1s sat proudly in the first row waiting for their turn to showcase their stories. As they waited for the assembly to begin, the children were framed by the faces of grandmas, grandpas, moms, dads, baby sisters and brothers who sat on the benches around the gym. On this last day of school, many in our community were here to celebrate alongside the students. As I sat listening to the stories of 16 Grade 1 students, I sensed the impact *Our Class Story* was having on the audience. As the children's stories played and the globe spun to show how far we all travelled to become a community of learners I shared in the sense of wonder felt in the gymnasium.

The animation in the movie which demonstrated the path of students flying around the globe to arrive at our school had a powerful impact. Hearing about the seven different countries which the children had lived in was incredible, but watching the globe spin as one-by-one they arrived in Canada was overwhelming. It really was impressive to think that the young children sitting in front of me had travelled more than I likely will in my entire lifetime.

After our assembly we returned to our room and shared one last snack and read *Our Class Story* for the last time together. During the final hour of our school year, we proudly walked with the entire school population through the community waving our red and white maple leaf flags in celebration of being Canadian.

As I walked I had the chance to listen to more stories, this time shared by the parents of the children in my class. We walked throughout the community as they talked more about the challenges they overcame as they settled in Canada. It was the perfect way to end our year together. At 11:30 the whole school gathered on the playground to bid farewell with a count-down to summer and the end of our journey together as a Grade 1 class. As the year came to an end, I knew I had made a difference in the lives of these children and their families.

Reflections on My Teaching Practice over the Past 4 Years

I was asked to connect to the hearts of my EAL students and as it turned out they connected to mine. It was not until *Our Class Story* was written, produced, and shared that I understood the power of this journey. Exposing my teaching practice through these fictionalized teaching journals which detailed my thoughts and actions allowed me to see myself in new ways.

Looking back at the first year of creating *Our Class Story* I realized that I was driven by the technical aspects of the project: What will the book look like? How will I create a movie? Who will be included? In the beginning this project was nothing more

than an assignment. However, towards the end, I discovered what Thompson (2008) already knew: “Each child has a unique history—a story that gives us insights when we interact, plan our classroom community, and design our instruction” (p. 1). Alongside the EAL students, the English speaking students were also able to share their diverse journeys to our classroom. All the while I came to know the human side of all of the children, how unique each of their needs were, and why I needed to think about how I planned my instruction to affirm their cultural and life experiences beyond our classroom door.

In year two my practice shifted as I became aware of the unique needs of EAL students. Cummins et al. (2005b) believed that “teachers have to create environments that affirm the identities of English language learners, thereby increasing the confidence with which these students engage in language and literacy activities” (p. 38). In the process of creating our second class story I found myself seeking out different approaches and strategies for the classroom. As my focus shifted to consider the needs of the whole child, so did my teaching practice. I noticed that my planning choices were more deliberate when I began to focus on the lives of the EAL children, not just on their academic needs.

In years three and four I engaged as an active participant in *Our Class Story*. Lotherington et al. (2008) recognized that “When expanding on classroom languages, the teacher must analyze and understand her own cultural positioning and primary discourse in the classroom” (p. 140). I had lived a different life than the children in Grade 1. In

composing my story I had to look into my past and select the events that lined the path which led to my current position. Inquiring into my past life experience I gained a better understanding of who I was and what I brought to the classroom. As a participant I saw *Our Class Story* from a completely different perspective, one that changed the way I interacted with children. Placing myself in the role of participant I also discovered how sensitive and fragile past experiences and stories could be when they were retold for others. As a result I became more aware of how I interacted with the students in my classroom and how I conversed with each of them.

After 4 years of engaging in *Our Class Story* I am awakened to the diversity that exists throughout the halls of our building. Thompson (2008) believes that “As teachers, helping children be successful requires not only teaching them English but understanding the stories of their pasts as well” (p. 1). This complex project is now familiar to me. I have traveled various directions to get to the destination of publishing a book and producing a movie. The journey is the same, yet it is always different. *Our Class Story* has changed naturally over time. It has grown deep roots into the Grade 1 classroom and into my teaching practice. It has become a meaningful way to establish classroom community and get to know each of the students as people living lives alongside each other. I see how we are all spread out onto a web, where we share common goals, interact with each other, and support our communal learning. Each year our web grows larger as the previous participants in *Our Class Story* continue to re-live and share their stories with us. These experiences prompt conversations among children so that they can

re-live and retell the stories that are important to them in their lives today. The continual re-living and retelling creates lasting vibrations that resonate back on to our classroom web.

There is always more than one way to teach children. Cummins et al. (2005a) argue that “Educators, individually and collectively, always have choices. They can choose to go beyond curricular guidelines and mandates. They can meet curricular expectations and standards in ways that acknowledge and respect students’ prior knowledge” (p. 42). *Our Class Story* has welcomed the children’s backgrounds, experiences, and lives into the classroom. This has supported me in meeting the children’s educational, emotional, and social needs. Going this one step further has made all the difference for me as a teacher. I have grown alongside the students as we entered into a collaborative process of sharing our journeys and discovering new things about each other. Palmer (1997) believes good teaching happens when teachers “are able to weave a complex web of connection between themselves, their subjects, and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 16). Over the past 4 years *Our Class Story* has become the bridge between two worlds: home and school. Parents and their children’s lives have been welcomed onto the classroom landscape and this has created vibrations on our classroom web. I have witnessed families participating in their child’s school experience and investing in our project. As a result children were able to make sense of their life experiences as they composed their story. It did not matter where they were residing—their school world or their home world

—because they had become one. As the students' home lives were welcomed onto our classroom landscape, a third space was created. It was a space where our lives and stories could exist in their entirety.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATIVE CONCLUSIONS

This journey began by chance and is ending with purpose. Four years ago I signed up for a course entitled *Language Academics and Literacy*. I did not realize at the time that this simple act would take me down a path that was life enhancing. Greene (1995) believes when “a person . . . chooses to view herself or himself in the midst of things, as a beginner or learner or explorer and has the imagination to envisage new things emerging, more and more begins to seem possible” (p. 22). Four years ago I opened the door to a new adventure. I began my narrative inquiry into my experience as an Early Years teacher working with EAL students in a mainstream Grade 1 classroom. Through this inquiry, I hoped to discover: How creating and writing *Our Class Story* over the past 4 years shifted my teaching practice and beliefs about teaching EAL Early Years Learners.

I did not foresee the profound changes in my life this inquiry would provide, but the journey I have travelled in composing and sharing my experience has helped me understand who I am as an educator. These experiences have guided my practice, changed my beliefs about how to best teach EAL children in the mainstream Early Years classroom, and refined my methods to improve the educational experience of EAL and English speaking students.

In this entire process, I have discovered and acknowledged the ways that I have changed as a teacher and as a person. As an educator I am motivated. I want to make changes which improve and enrich the lives of children. I want all children to feel

connected and part of a learning community, especially when they have recently arrived in Canada and everything in their world is foreign. *Our Class Story* has achieved this goal for me. As Greene (1995) suggests, “in thinking of community, we need to emphasize the process words: making, creating, weaving, saying and the like. Community cannot be produced simply through rational formulation nor through edict” (p. 39). By engaging children as they create and write their stories they are able to connect as a community of learners. Greene advocates that teachers must be creative and imaginative as “our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture—for all children—the sense of worthiness and agency” (p. 41). The children who have come through my classroom have taught me how to persevere. They continue to learn new things, make friends, and discover a new language and culture despite the prior experiences.

I will likely never experience moving to a distant country, starting a new life, or rediscovering who I am. I have a small glimpse of how terrifying navigating your way can be in a new place. I am not a quitter. I did not give up searching for my EAL course when I was lost in rural Manitoba. I carried on and continued to discover new methods and ideas to challenge and support my beliefs about educating EAL students in the mainstream classroom. I will not give up on trying to meet the needs of the diverse students in my class. My journey is far from over. I will continue to build and learn new ways to support EAL students in my classroom. But as I approach the conclusion of writing about my experience, I know that another opportunity awaits. I will keep myself

open to the educational possibilities that may come my way, remembering all the things that I have learned about myself, my practice, and my beliefs.

Our Class Story has evolved. As I look back over the past 4 years of this project I can see the various developments in its process and how it has expanded into the meaningful and enriching classroom experience it is today. The project has completely taken on a life of its own. At the core there remain three strong values which I have adopted into my teaching practice.

First, I need to trust. I need to trust my judgment, my intuition, and my perceptions as a teacher. I need to trust my students and families so that I can place my story and theirs within the frame of the classroom we share.

Second, I need to be sensitive. I need to listen to our footsteps as we live alongside each other, learning to read, to write, and to inquire into the world around us. If I am sensitive and aware, I will feel the silent vibrations on our classroom web. I need to sense when tensions arise, in order to adjust and fine-tune the classroom environment to address them and the needs of all who place themselves on our web of connectedness.

Third, I need to honour the child. All children enter into the classroom as individuals with life experiences that have impacted their knowledge and understanding of the world as they journeyed to our class. Greene (1995) believes

attending concretely to these children in their difference and their connectedness, feeling called on truly to attend—to read the child's word, to look at the child's

sketch—teachers may find themselves responding imaginatively and, at length, ethically to these children. (pp. 41–42).

By honouring the child I am able to honour his or her experience, language, and culture in our classroom. Honouring and valuing the experiences of the children I teach sends a strong message. It does not matter what language you speak, you are welcome here where you are valued and honoured alongside your peers. As a result of investing the time into *Our Class Story* I feel more connected than I ever have been with my students and their families.

All of this may sound easy and straightforward. However, this journey was fraught with obstacles, challenges, and tensions. Getting here was not easy. Writing about my own experiences was hard, more than I imagined it would be. Even as I began writing this final chapter, I found myself hesitating and procrastinating, more than my usual amount, and then I realized why: My personal experiences are shifting from the sanctity of my home to the public forum where others will be able to witness part of my private life and thoughts. My story as an Early Years mainstream teacher working with diverse EAL populations is exposed, to be read by others.

I wonder and I worry: What will others say? Will they judge my experience as inadequate or inaccurate? Will I still feel like I belong to the community of Manitoba educators? Reflecting upon these questions leads me to understand that throughout this thesis I have explored many situations where balance disappeared in my teaching practice. Exploring my disequilibrium is actually how I have learned more about myself

and my students. My beliefs about teaching young children will only change if I voluntarily enter into these tension-filled spaces and attempt to make sense of what is occurring. Just like my students need to feel part of a learning community, I too, need to feel as though I still belong and am accepted in the community of Early Years teachers in Manitoba.

Inquiring into these tensions while paying attention to the narrative inquiry dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place allows me to make sense of my experience. Clandinin et al. (2010) explain “tensions that live between people, events, or things . . . are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways” (p. 82). Returning to the classroom this fall I will accept spaces of tension and envision each as an opportunity for growth.

First, I will trust myself. I will make choices and take the best course of action with the knowledge I have. When I get it wrong I will trust in my strength as an educator to make it right, not only for the students’ sake, but also for mine.

Second, I will be sensitive to what I need as a person and as a teacher. I will remain alert to the vibrations I feel as I move on and off our classroom web and as I travel between the space of my school world and my home world.

Third and finally, I will honour myself by living authentically to my full capacity. I will respond with finely differentiated emotions to the complexities of classroom life. I will utilize my knowledge as a person and practicing teacher and rely on my past

experiences to understand and pursue what works for me as I teach children on the diverse Manitoba educational landscape.

As I move forward I will embrace these “between spaces,” make sense of them, and learn new ideas to help shape my understanding of teaching EAL students. I have discovered learning can be uncomfortable and messy; so too can stories. King (2003) cautions the storyteller “for once a story is told, it cannot be called back. Once told, it is loose in the world” (p. 10). True, but stories also change over time and when shared in different places the story shifts to accept the three dimensional space in which it is being told. I will continue to tell stories as they are a part of me. They are who I am. My story over time will change and grow as I continue to teach on the diverse classroom landscape of Manitoba. And, like King, I too feel that “stories help keep me alive” (p. 119).

Thomas King (2003), a scholar and aboriginal storyteller, shared his hope as a writer when he said, “We wrote knowing that none of the stories we told would change the world. But we wrote in the hope that they would” (p. 92). It is my hope that in opening the doors to my classroom, to my teaching practice, and ultimately to myself, that others will take notice. I am optimistic that my colleagues in Manitoba or any other educator who has walked alongside me in this very long journey will be inspired to make changes to their teaching practice, their methods, and how they think about EAL children on their school landscape. In sharing my journey I hope that I can connect to other teachers and provide them with a new perspective or reaffirm they are making a

difference as they work through new challenges of the diverse educational landscape presenting in Manitoba classrooms.

I began this project after an invitation to touch the hearts of my students. I have come to learn so much more. It is my students who have touched my heart, traveled a path woven with the stories of ourselves, and awakened me to the knowledge that I need to make changes, grow as a professional, and share my experiences so other mainstream EAL teachers can learn from *Our Class Story*. This was my journey and it worked for me.

So now I would like to extend the same invitation to others: Reach out and connect with students in a new way which builds connectedness and community within your classroom walls. Attend to the storied lives of the children who look to you each day and wonder about their future here in Canada. Travel a familiar path or discover a new one. Just remember to listen to the rhythm of your steps, remain open to the experience, and persevere when you encounter obstacles in your way. Embrace the opportunity to reach out and address the diversity in our Manitoba schools. It will be equally exhausting as it is exhilarating, but in the end, it will be worth it.

EPILOGUE

Although I have reached the end of this journey, I have not reached the end of *Our Class Story*. Even as I am writing this I am already thinking about the direction for the upcoming year. Thinking about the future possibilities is exciting. Each new school year welcomes new students, new stories, and introduces the possibilities of new adventures. Only time will tell in what direction we collectively choose to travel as a class. As for myself, I am ready to step outside of my classroom with Grade 1 students and revisit *Our Class Story* with the first group of students who joined me on this journey. I am curious to see how the story will evolve as time has passed and how we will have grown and changed. The best part about sharing our experiences is that each time they are retold it is always heard and understood in a new way. *Our Class Story* will continue to impact my teaching practice wherever I may travel.

REFERENCES

- Chan, E. (2006). Teacher experiences of culture in the curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 38, 161–176. doi:10.1080/00220270500391605
- Choi, Y. (2003). *The name jar*. Edmond, OK: Dragonfly Books.
- Chung, S. (2008). Composing a curriculum of lives: A narrative inquiry into the interwoven intergenerational stories of teachers, children and families. (Unpublished master's thesis). University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., Murphy, M. S., Huber, J., & Murray Orr, A. (2010). Negotiating narrative inquiries: Living in a tension-filled midst. *Journal of Educational Research*, 103, 81–90. doi:10.1080/00220670903323404
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (1988). *Teachers as curriculum planners narratives of experience*. Toronto, ON, Canada: OISE Press.
- Connelly, F. M., & Clandinin, D. J. (2006). Narrative inquiry. In J. L. Green, G. Camilli, & P. Elmore (Eds.), *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (3rd ed., pp. 477–487). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (2007). Narrative learning, EAL and metacognitive development. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 177, 645–660. doi: 10.01080/03004430701379074

- Cox, C., & Boyd-Batstone, P. S. (2009). *Engaging English language learners: Exploring literature, developing literacy, and differentiating instruction*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Coyle, D. (2009). *The talent code: Greatness isn't born. It's grown. Here's how*. New York, NY: Random House Inc.
- Crandall, J. (2003). The expanding role of the elementary ESL teacher: Doing more than teaching language. *Accent*, *10*(1), 1–6. Retrieved from <http://eslc.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/The%20Expanding%20Role%20of%20Elementary%20Teacher.pdf>
- Cummins, J. (1980). The cross-lingual dimensions of language proficiency: Implications for bilingual education and the optimal age issue. *TESOL Quarterly*, *14*(2), 175-187.
- Cummins, J., Bismilla, V., Cohen, S., Giampapa, F., & Leoni, L. (2005a). Timelines and lifelines: Rethinking literacy instruction in multilingual classrooms. *Orbit*, *36*(1), 22–26. Retrieved from <http://www.tvo.org/TVOOrg/Images/voresources/901D3C15-F854-5899-DEE921790AC5AD4E.pdf>
- Cummins, J., Bismilla, V., Cohen, S., Giampapa, F., Leoni, L., Sandhu, P., & Sastri, P. (2005b). Affirming identity in multilingual classrooms. *Educational Leadership*, *63*(1), 38–43. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx>

- Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (Eds.). (1998). *The hundred languages of children the Reggio Emilia approach—advanced reflections*. Westport, CT: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Gibbons, P. (2003). Mediating language learning: Teacher interactions with ESL students in a content-based classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(2), 247–273. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/stable/10.2307/3588504>
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts and social change*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Huber, J., & Clandinin, J. (2002). Ethical dilemmas in relational narrative inquiry with children. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 785–803. doi 0.1177/1077800402238079
- King, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: A native narrative*. Toronto, ON, Canada: House of Anansi Press Inc.
- Lionni, L. (1968). *The alphabet tree*. New York, NY: Knopf Books.
- Lotherington, H., Holland, M., Sotoudeh, S., & Zentena, M. (2008). Project-based community language learning: Three narratives of multilingual story-telling in early childhood education. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 65, 125–145. doi:10.1353/cml.0.0021
- Manitoba Education. (2011). *Manitoba kindergarten to grade 12 curriculum framework for English as an additional language (EAL) and literacy, academics, and language (LAL) programming*. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/eal/framework/index.html>

- Manitoba Labor and Immigration. (2009). *Manitoba immigration facts: 2009 statistical report*. Retrieved from http://www2.immigratemanitoba.com/asset_library/en/resources/pdf/manitoba-immigration-facts-report-2009.pdf
- Milton, P. (2006). Multilingualism: The Canadian way. *Education Canada*, 46(4), 55. Retrieved from <http://proquest.umi.com.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca.pdf/600634945>
- Narrative. (2011). In Oxford Dictionaries online. Retrieved from <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/narrative>
- Palmer, P. (1997). The heart of a teacher: Identity and integrity in teaching. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 29, 15–21. doi:10.1080/00091389709602343
- Penfield, J. (1987). ESL: The regular classroom teacher's perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(1), 21–39. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/stable/10.2307/3586353>
- Saito, A. P. (2008). Between me and the world: Teaching poetry to English language learners. *Teaching Artist Journal*, 6, 197–208. doi:1080/15411790802134319
- Thompson, S. (2008). Appreciating diversity through children's stories and language development. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 10(1). Retrieved from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/v10n1/thompson.html>
- Toohy, K., & Day, E. (1999). Language-learning: The importance of access to community. *TESL Canada Journal*, 17(1), 40–53. Retrieved from <http://teslcanadajournal.ca.proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/index.php/tesl/article/viewFile/879/698>

- Toohy, K., Day, E., & Manyak, P. (2007). ESL learners in the early school years: Identity and mediated classroom practices. *International Handbook of English Language Teaching*, 15, 625–638. doi:10.1007/978-0387-46301-8_40
- VanPatten, B., & Williams, J. (2008). *Theories in second language acquisition*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Walter, T. (2004). *Teaching English language learners: The how-to handbook*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Wang, Y., Many, J., & Krumenaker, L. (2008). Understanding the experiences and needs mainstream teachers of ESL students: Reflections from a secondary social studies teacher. *TESL Canada Journal*, 25(2), 66–84. Retrieved from <http://journals.sfu.ca/proxy1.lib.umanitoba.ca/tesl/index.php/tesl/article/viewFile/130/130>
- Watts-Taffe, S., & Truscott, D. M. (2000). Using what we know about language and literacy development for ESL students in the mainstream classroom. *Language Arts*, 77(3), 258–265. Retrieved from <http://www.sandi.net/cms/lib/CA01001235/Centricity/Domain/101/RTI/Scaffolding%20for%20ESL.pdf>