NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A FORM OF TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an action research project in the sense that I inquire into experiences that have contributed to the formation of my professional subjectivity as a public school teacher. These experiences are constructed in research narratives. In the first chapter, I describe in narrative how I first came to action research in the course of a series of reflective conversations with a colleague. In the second chapter, I theorize action research as a reflective and transformative conversation about pedagogical actions or forms of action. This conversation occurs within a research collective. Chapters three, four, and five document the reading-responses of a group of teachers to three research narratives. These responses are interpreted and placed into the context of my pedagogical concerns and educational values. Discussion of how the members of the research collective may have transformed their practice lies outside the scope of this study. Chapter six examines how the textual maneuvers of the research narratives represent action research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Chapter one:

How I came to narrative inquiry and action research

I have arrived at my present sense of self as a classroom teacher in the course of different conversations about teaching and learning. Some of these conversations have advanced my development as a reflective teacher; others have obstructed it. Throughout this thesis, I will suggest that narrative inquiry as a form of teacher action research entailing a reflective conception of professional conversation and of classroom teaching has contributed to my development as a reflective teacher. I will also show that my research narratives have offered points of departure for critical and reflective conversations about the construction of teaching and classroom practice.

I will refer to two kinds of conversations about teaching and learning: **prescriptive conversations** and **reflective conversations**. In the context of a prescriptive conversation, a teacher who is deemed more competent describes better practice to another teacher who will uncritically implement the advice to improve his or her practice. A reflective conversation takes place between equal partners who help each other interpret and improve the learning situation(s) in their classrooms. Plans for improved teaching practice are discussed with reference to the learning situation(s) under description. These plans and the resulting actions remain under ongoing scrutiny as the situation evolves. These two conversations and the manner of my participation in them continue to influence the ongoing formation of my actions and my self-understanding as a teacher. In the context of my teaching experiences, I came to understand action research

as a reflective conversation which is juxtaposed to a prescriptive way of speaking about teaching and learning. I will include interpreted narratives of these experiences to retrace the development of my understanding of reflective teaching. In this chapter, a short description of this juxtaposition will lead to an outline of the thesis as a whole.

During my final year as an undergraduate student in Education taking curriculum and instruction courses in second-language methodology, my teachers and faculty supervisors engaged me in a series of prescriptive conversations about current teaching practices in second-language instruction. These conversations followed a similar pattern. The first step involved showing me how to draw up purposeful and strategic lesson plans. The second step entailed some form of clinical observation and corrective feedback which identified strategic errors in my practice and offered suggestions for dealing more effectively with classroom contingencies. The third step consisted of further classroom observations to see how I was able to act on these suggestions. In this conversation, I limited my role to listening carefully to my mentors and understanding the strategic moves expected of classroom teachers to maintain order in the class and to allow students to develop skills in the second language under study. The prescriptive quality of this conversation does not mean that I was at any time treated with disrespect. My mentors and I believed that I required a bag of tricks and strategic moves simply to get my foot inside the classroom door. In order to develop any real teaching experience, I needed to know how to manage a classroom and act like a teacher. Indeed, I was able to start my first year of teaching with a bag of generic teaching strategies that earned me kudos from my first principal.

This prescriptive conversation continued for the first three years of my teaching career in the form of clinical supervision. One of the administrators described the ongoing and formalized clinical supervision of all the teachers in his school as a necessary form of quality control. In most cases, these "classroom visitations" were unannounced and they usually occurred three times in a school year. Within a week or two of these "Mary Poppins," as my colleagues referred to them, two copies of an evaluation typed on a form were placed in my mailbox, one copy to be returned signed. A sentence at the bottom of the form encouraged me to arrange an appointment with the principal, if any points in the evaluation required clarification. I never responded to this invitation because these evaluations consistently described me as competent teacher: "The daybook shows evidence of careful planning. The students participated actively in the language lesson. The lesson proceeded quickly without awkward pauses. Student notebooks are continuously and meticulously verified by the teacher." However, it was not all praise. Usually, these evaluations problematized housekeeping issues: "Make sure the light bulb in the overhead projector is working before you start the lesson" or "Always have extra photocopies of worksheets on hand in case some students wish to redo their work." After taking notice of the directions, I discarded most of these evaluations within a day or two of receiving them.

The critical other in these prescriptive conversations believes that the apprentice needs to be told what to do in order to improve aspects of his teaching practice. When I was a student teacher, these prescriptions helped me attain a degree of technical competence.

The clinical supervision I received in the first three years of my teaching career continued to certify my professional competence and had the curious effect of suggesting to me that the administrators at my school believed that they had a clear conception of best practice. Apparently, they also believed that they could help teachers attain better educational practice by dispensing tidbits of practical advice. During the third year of my teaching career, I concluded that teaching in this particular school division was considered a job requiring a set of preconceived technical skills and that the views of teachers were always subordinate to the administrator's preconceptions. I found it particularly disheartening that even teachers with ten or twenty years of classroom experience were treated as apprentices and maintained in relationships of strict subordination and dependence on the principal's approval. I decided to resign and move to another division where I would participate in a very different professional conversation.

I immediately noticed a difference in the professional identity of teachers at my new school. First, the principal and the vice-principal consistently described themselves as teachers and not as the local agents of quality control. Shirley, the principal who supervised my probationary year in the division, visited my classroom regularly. These visits were not formalized events, like the "Mary Poppins" I had grown used to. Shirley never walked into the room to sit silently at an empty desk and to start writing her notes for a formal evaluation. Instead, she observed the activity in the room and spoke with the children and later with me about their projects.

To me, the word project means activity with forethought and purpose. As a teacher, I have purposes in mind when I set tasks and activities for the children. However, the teacher is not the only person acting intentionally and purposefully in the classroom. Teaching means allowing the children to find personal and educational purposes within classroom activity and allowing them a hand in planning it. Shirley's visits and my conversations with her allowed me to recognize the importance of observing and speaking with kids about their work in the classroom. This would help me think about the first question she raised:

1. What is happening for the kids in the class?

To me this question meant thinking about the pedagogical problems I was trying to resolve in my own practice. These problems shifted and evolved throughout the three years she and I worked together. Initially, there were two areas of concern to me. First, as a beginning teacher in grade one, I needed to learn appropriate housekeeping skills. The classroom space needed to be organized to better accommodate the activities of a group of five and six-year old children. They also needed to be taught how to use and maintain their space. Many of the children's belongings were scattered all over the classroom and this disorder was getting in the way of our activities. Second, I was searching for meaningful ways of teaching five-year olds literacy skills. I believed that opportunities for reading and writing needed to be an extension of the children's oral language use. But I was not sure how to go about making the connection between oral and written language. I found that the assigned reading and writing tasks which I contrived with deference to narrow and decontextualized instructional objectives were often disconnected from each other, as well as from the children's life experiences and, therefore, staged within a

vacuum. I did not believe that teaching meant programming their minds like computer hard drives. However, it seemed to me that some of the tasks I set the children contradicted this belief. Watching the children, I noticed that these activities were mostly a waste of time until I rethought them critically. The following example will illustrate what I mean.

On one morning, I spent five minutes holding up and naming colorful objects in the target language and having the children repeat my descriptive sentences. Then as a follow-up testing activity, I asked them to take out their crayons and issued instructions in the target language such as, "Draw a green line." The children ended up with lines, circles, and triangles of different colours on a white sheet of paper. Some of the children had listened and followed my instructions correctly. Others copied what their neighbours were drawing. A handful of children started drawing their own pictures. My purpose in this activity was to teach and test listening comprehension of ten colour words in French. I realized that this purpose was not apparent or important enough to the children when Bryant shouted, "We're drawing stupid pictures! I'll draw you rainbow water!" I rethought the situation and told them: "All right! We'll draw our own pictures and then talk about the colours in them." That sounded acceptable to everyone and the conversations about colours began. However, the conversation was richer because it was also about the ideas which the children brought to their drawings.

Teaching is a reflective conversation with the children and the situations we create for each other. Paying attention to Bryant's signal allowed me to rethink my instructions to

make room for his and my purposes in the activity. Shirley suggested thinking about such practical problems in the framework of a second question:

2. What am I doing and why am I doing it?

We agreed that good teaching required recognizing the abilities and the potential strengths of individual children and planning activities which would further these strengths. The class as a social grouping can be the stage where individual children work together to allow each other to develop these strengths, as well as, new skills. Of course, as the teacher, I did not form haphazard or purely subjective judgements about my students' strengths and potential abilities. First, I believed that literacy was within all the children's grasp. However, there was a wide range of individual differences in the ways children used written text. My instruction needed to respect and respond to these differences.

During our daily reading and storytelling period, six-year-old Allison picked up my copy of *The Complete Tales of the Brothers Grimm* and started reading "Hansel and Gretel" aloud to a group of three classmates. Her friend, Keith listened with interest. When Allison asked him to continue reading, he answered, "I can't. I only read picture books." Afterwards he drew a detailed picture of the witch's hut in his journal and wrote: "TODA ALLN RED A SOR ABT A WT." During the conference with him, I asked, "What did you write here?" Keith replied, "Today Allison read a story about a witch." I scribed what he said below his text and told him, "This is how grown-ups spell what you have written." He copied my sentence very carefully. When I met with Allison a few minutes later, she showed me a letter she was writing to "Hansel and Gretel" congratulating them

on killing the witch. The text contained about fifty words, most of them in standard spelling. I asked her, "Are you going to draw a picture to go along with this letter?" To which she replied, "Letters don't have pictures. And I don't like drawing." Keith and Allison exemplify the plurality of any class and its inherent range of individual differences in abilities and interests. I started keeping these differences in mind, as I planned a picture book project. I asked Keith and Allison to collaborate on an illustrated book about one of the four tales I had read to the class during the week. They chose "Hansel and Gretel."

My intention as their teacher was to have these two students draw on each other's skills in the acts of writing and illustrating the book. I did not want them to simply exercise their own strengths. At first, Keith wanted to draw all the illustrations and have Allison write the story — exactly the economical division of labor I was trying to avoid. Therefore, during the first conference in which we talked about the project I asked them to draw and write together:

1. Draw five or six pictures which tell your story. Talk about the words that will go with each drawing.

2. Then say each sentence before writing it. When you write, take turns writing.

During the first stage of the activity, Allison did most of the talking as they drew simultaneously on a sheet of paper. Keith responded to her suggestions with his ideas and he began musing about the witch's reasons for wanting to eat children. Thinking about a character's intentions might not have occurred to Keith outside of this conversation. Suddenly, Keith suggested they should take turns drawing when Allison started

scribbling blue lines across the top of the page. He started giving her technical advice on how to use the whole sheet instead of filling it up with a scribbled blue sky. The following day, during the writing phase, something surprising happened. I had expected Keith to be taking dictation from Allison who had always shown herself to be more articulate. However, the conversation of the previous day had prepared them both for writing the text. Keith wrote fluently. Allison merely told him which vowels needed to be added to his words. Their talk focussed mostly on phrasing the sentences and on correctly spelling individual words.

There were twenty other children reading, speaking, drawing, and writing at the same time. I realized that some of the students did not have a clear idea of what should be happening at this time. Christine and Joan had quietly gotten out glue, sparkles, and pencil shavings and were mixing these in a plastic cup. They were silently observing the mixture when I approached.

"What are you doing?" I asked them suspecting that their activity had absolutely nothing to do with my goals. They had apparently found something more interesting than writing about one of the folk tales I had read to the class. I decided to find out, if their activity would lend itself to writing.

They replied, "We are doing an experiment."

"What's an experiment?"

"You do something and then you see what happens."

"All right, before you go on with this I want you to write down what you have done and seen so far. Then write down what you think is going to happen next in your experiment." I was not sure whether I had made the right decision. Had I given them a stern and disapproving look, Christine and Joan would likely have thrown their experiment into the garbage bin and chosen a tale to write about. However, this lesson was about writing and not obedience. The two seemed genuinely interested in their experiment and started writing. I would engage Christine and Joan in a conversation about their story grammar – more specifically, their sequential ordering of the experience in a first person narrative and their predictions of what would happen next. Some teachers would suggest that I was accommodating two wayward children and that school is also about learning to follow directions. To which I would reply, children need to follow directions that matter. Christine and Joan would show me soon enough whether I had made the right decision. I would pay close attention to their conversation and their story about the experiment.

In our conversations about these incidents, Shirley and I narrativized my teaching role and the children's activities in the classroom. These oral narratives gave us a starting point for:
1. clarifying my pedagogical intentions and actions,
2. interpreting the children's intentions and actions,
3. planning my pedagogical responses to their activity.

These are also three essential moments in an action research cycle. The foregoing narratives suggest that these moments inform each other and are inextricably interconnected. Most importantly, however, these narratives were first constructed in the course of reflective and purposeful conversations. Defensiveness played no part in them because Shirley was clearly interested in furthering my professional development. Wanting me in control of my own learning, she expected me to name and describe practical problems as I saw them. However, these problems were always context specific and they always signified educational purposes for particular children (see also Schön, 1998).

We did not call this action research. Nonetheless, Shirley helped me take a more reflective stance towards my educational practice. In hindsight, I understand these reflective conversations as a cycle of apprenticeship in reflective teaching because our discussions followed a hermeneutic circle of observation, reflection, planning, and evolving pedagogy (Parker, 1997, p.40).

At the same time, other teachers at the school invited me to start an action research project. I had never heard of the term before and was rather intrigued even though the invitation itself struck me as rather vague. Jennifer, one of my colleagues, left several photocopied articles and a handbook on action research methodology in my mailbox. I skimmed the articles and the handbook very quickly and did not think about actually starting a research project until she raised the question during a lunch-hour conversation in the staffroom.

I will try to reconstruct this conversation here even though it took place approximately twelve years ago. But I can say with some confidence that I remember the essential details quite clearly.

Jennifer asked, "So Matt, are you going to do an action research project?"

To which I replied, "Well I'm not even sure about what question to ask. And then I have no idea about how to go about doing it." I had other things on my mind.

In my conversations with Shirley, the question of greatest concern to me was how to respond better to the individual differences and the wide range of literacy skills in my grade one classroom. Then, I did not see how this problem might be articulated as an action research question. Indeed, my preoccupation with working out successful and age-appropriate teaching strategies posthaste eclipsed any sustained interest in action research.

"You start with a question that bears directly on your teaching and then you research the question," Jennifer responded.

"Give me some examples of action research questions and tell me how I might go about researching them."

"Well, Matt, one of the things you want to look out for as an immersion teacher is that all the kids are participating in language games and classroom discussions. Your first action research project could help you understand who speaks in your class and who doesn't speak at all or very little. Then based on the information you gather, you can think about creating opportunities for those kids because you want everyone to speak in a French immersion classroom."

"How would you gather the information?"

"One of the paraprofessionals could help you with that. Give her a classroom list. Choose a ten-minute observation time. Plan an activity and have the para put check marks next to children's names each time they speak."

"Jennifer, this would have to be a whole-group discussion because one or two people could not keep track of twenty-five children speaking and working at centers, for example."

"Yes, that's right."

"And then we have to decide what kind of verbal utterance qualifies for a check mark. Any kind of statement in English or French? Only French sentences?"

"Yes, you would have to work that out. And it depends, of course, on your precise research question."

I followed Jennifer's advice. I decided that I wanted to know who was speaking and who remained silent during class discussions. Two days later, Jacqueline, one of the paraprofessionals at our school, entered during a pre-arranged time and began observing the conversation I was having with the children.

During the follow-up conversation with me, Jacqueline pointed out that she had followed instructions given to her previously for a similar observation in Jennifer's classroom. First, Jacqueline had distinguished statements addressed to me and to the class from whispered statements made to a peer. Each checkmark represented a statement made within the class discussion. Each circle represented a whispered comment to a peer. Second, Jacqueline had also counted all clearly audible statements as belonging to the discussion even Bryant's sudden outburst, "I lost my micro-machine!"

The data generated during this observation consisted, of course, only of check marks and circles inscribed next to the names of children who had spoken and of blank spaces next to the names of the children who had remained silent. There were no surprises for me. The data showed me what I already knew. I had already decided to keep track of the quiet children informally and was looking for ways of drawing them into our discussions. At this time, I understood that the research question I had asked was too narrow and that my research method had failed to generate usable data even though it appeared objective and

scientific. Furthermore, the data did not help me think about practical curricular issues of concern to me. The important question of the moment was how to get six-year-olds to listen, speak, read, and write with greater understanding in French and English. However, I saw no way of formulating a focussed research question and a corresponding method of data collection. So, I abandoned formalized action research and focussed on the day-to-day effort of becoming a better teacher.

In retrospect, I realize that this particular action research project never got off the ground because Jennifer had prescribed a research question and a methodology for gathering data. The point of departure for this project had been a prescriptive conversation. By definition, such conversations are one-sided in the sense that one speaker projects his understanding on another who uncritically assimilates it. Quite possibly, Jennifer may have described or prescribed her own action research project.

The data generated by the research method I employed may seem objective at first glance. However, the circles and checkmarks evaporated into meaninglessness once I placed them in the context of my guiding questions:

1. What is happening for the children in my classroom?

2. What am I doing? Why am I doing it?

It was not until five years later that I encountered the concept of action research again, this time in a graduate course at the University of Manitoba. I learned that action research offered opportunities for reflective inquiry similar to those offered to me during my conversations with Shirley.

In this thesis, I will investigate the claim that narrative inquiry as a form of action research provides teachers with opportunities for reflective discussions about learning and teaching. The foregoing narratives were embedded in reflective conversations that I had with my principal more than ten years ago. At no time did she prescribe a better course of action. Rather, she wanted to hear my action plans and the educational reasons that justified them in my mind. My actions plans always drew on our classroom observations constructed in narrative. On the other hand, my experience of prescriptive conversations is that they forego careful examination of classroom events. There are many reasons for the prominence of nifty tips and quick fixes in our professional conversation:

1. An educator may believe that a particular problem does not require sustained or careful reflection because a short cut to a quick fix is already at hand.

2. An experienced educator may dispense a few nifty tips to a novice believing that he will benefit from stepping into the classroom with a bag of practical tricks until he comes to recognize the complexity of the classroom and the difficulties inherent in assimilating the practical experiences of another educator.

3. A teacher may understand his task as the technical application of educational strategies. These would be implements in a toolbox that allow the teacher to effect predetermined learning outcomes in children.

In short, when I speak with another teacher about an educational issue, I always already draw on **implicit** or **explicit understandings** of what it means to teach, of how we critically examine and reshape our pedagogical practice, and of how we communicate our insights to each other. These **understandings** are the matrix in which teaching practices

are discussed, enacted, and examined. My aim will be to show that narrative inquiry as a form of action research can, under the right conditions, allow us to clarify these understandings and improve actual teaching practices in the classroom.

The thesis is organized around six chapters. The foregoing pages of chapter one introduced the thesis and provided an autobiographical background to my interest in narrative inquiry and action research.

Chapter two explains that the theoretical foundations of action research and narrative inquiry are by no means uncontested or universally agreed upon. In this discussion, I offer reasons for rejecting attempts to have teacher action research conform to objectivist expectations. In their stead, I suggest, Habermasian discourse ethics may offer guidelines for a critical and transformative educational conversation in which we may contextualize our narratives of teaching. This conversation would help us interpret our pedagogical actions as socially constructed and susceptible to critical transformation through action research.

I conclude chapter two with a brief outline of the research study in which fifteen teachers individually read and respond in writing to three narratives. Each narrative represents an attempt to invite readers to help me identify and explore educational issues of critical importance to my practice. This study qualifies as action research in the sense that the narratives facilitate explorations of my professional subjectivity and of its ongoing formation within the institutional culture of the school. I believe that the ongoing

formation of my professional subjectivity informs my practice in ways that are not self-evident. Theoretical claims about narrative inquiry will also emerge in the context of the narratives and the readers' responses to them. The narratives and the teachers' responses appear in their entirety in chapters three, four, and five.

In chapter three, I suggest that narrative inquiry properly foregrounds the plurality of all learning collectives in the school system – be they groups of children or teachers. The research program of a group of teachers engaged in narrative inquiry needs a plurality of perspectives which is a condition for the possibility of reflective dialogue. The reading responses to the first narrative provide insights into this plurality.

The narrative of chapter four examines the pragmatic failure of technical and prescriptive discourse in the conversation of teachers. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which the readers interweave their own narratives of experience with the text to explore their own lives as teachers and the ways in which they were socialized into the professional conversation.

Chapter five extends the idea of reflective conversation to the classroom curriculum and the activity of children. The narrative outlines a thematic unit in a grade-three classroom and describes a conscious pedagogic effort to have children construct knowledge in the context of shared experiences and reflective dialogue. At this point, the reading-responses of the teachers become more varied. There are instances of sharp disagreement with the apparent intention of the narrative and its view of classroom dialogue and curriculum. A

look at the reading-responses will tell us how narrative facilitates critical inquiry and reflective conversation about substantive curricular issues.

In conclusion, chapter six explains how the textual maneuvers of the research narratives represent action research.

Chapter two:

Theorizing narrative inquiry as a form of action research

Until about five years ago, I believed that the purpose of the action researcher was merely to examine and to improve her classroom practice with the assistance of one or more critical others. This self-improvement seemed like a necessary and sufficient mandate for action research. In the course of this chapter, I wish to outline how my view of narrative inquiry as a form of action research has evolved to recognize the necessity of a theorized account. I will discuss the objectivist aspirations of some action research methodologies. Drawing on Dewey and Popper, I will suggest that research methods are tools of an epistemological theory which evolves and changes in accordance with the pragmatic purposes of the researchers. I will describe how ideas drawn from Newman, Winter, Connelly & Clandinin, Rorty, Habermas, and Iser have helped me arrive at the research study which I will outline at the end of this chapter.

For me, the journey towards a theorized form of action research began with a series of graduate courses in the context of a master's degree program at the University of Manitoba. Teachers from Seven Oaks School Division had enrolled in these courses as a cohort. The divisional administration and the university faculty actively supported this project. I joined this group with four purposes in mind. I wanted to

1. learn about action research as curriculum inquiry,

2. understand my teaching more clearly,

3. work on an action research project together with a group of colleagues,

4. and write a thesis about my work.

Professor Judith Newman taught the first two courses and introduced us to a form of action research which was driven by critical incident narratives. This experience was the point of departure in my effort to arrive at a theorized action research. For this reason, excerpts from her writings in which she describes her work with other teacher research groups will feature prominently in this chapter.

In "Tensions of teaching" Newman (1998b) carves out a role for critical incidents in teacher action research and describes how she introduced a group of teachers to this form of curriculum inquiry,

> We invented a vehicle for ourselves – critical incidents – to help us explore what was happening in our classrooms. I started out by asking the teachers to make note of whatever was going on that made them uncomfortable, moments when they weren't sure what decision to make, or where they were unhappy with the consequences of some judgement they'd made. We recorded very brief accounts of these moments on small index cards and then discussed these incidents in class. These stories became the basis of our inquiry into curriculum.

Newman (1998a) also suggests that teachers do not spontaneously engage in action research inquiry because they "lack experiences with self-directed learning" (p.15). Therefore, as the teacher educator, Newman (1998c) plays a dual role: "...first, to help both novice and experienced teachers think about substantive elements of curriculum and instruction..." and "...second, to support them as they invent/reinvent their practice." Critical incident narratives help drive this process of invention and reinvention, as the teachers narrate their practices with a view to reconstructing and changing them – hopefully for the better.

The narratives interwoven into a theorized action research cycle would describe how the elements of observation, reflection, and planning relate to each other within it. First, in the act of observation the narrative would outline how it served the heuristic purpose of constructing and describing the problems of inquiry. These are always problems embedded within patterns of human praxis and interaction and recounted by a situated narrator, a contingent self. Second, in its reflexive moment, the narrative would describe the origins of the problem and its dynamics within the social system to which it and the action researcher(s) belong. Third, the narrative would help the action researcher(s) imagine, discuss, and plan alternate courses of action which might interrupt or transform the conditions being problematized by the research. The cycle would continue with enacting this plan and observing how the situation under study evolves. In short, narrative plays a decisive role in action research methodology. In my mind, this immediately raises the question: where does the methodology originate?

Popper (1996) situates method as a tool of theory, "...it is the myth or the theory which leads to, and guides, our systematic observations" (p.127). I can also call this myth an epistemology because it grounds our inquiry and its resulting claims to knowledge. Popper's idea of a "searchlight theory of science" suggests that "...observations and their accumulation should be considered as the result of the growth of the scientific theories" (p.127). A theory of narrative inquiry is a self-conscious myth that would help us shed light on school and classroom practices. This myth is necessarily unstable and subject to ongoing revision to improve its usefulness in helping us understand our classroom

practice. As the epistemology evolves, we would expect it to help us solve curriculum problems and, in doing so, direct our attention to many more.

In *The sources of a science of education*, Dewey (1929) already tells us that practical concerns ought to be the alpha and the omega of a pragmatic educational science, "...educational practices provide the data, the subject-matter, which form the problems of inquiry." These practices are also "...the final test of value of the conclusion of all researches" (p. 33). This idea encapsulates the pragmatic ambition of teacher action research to improve educational practice and children's experiences at school.

Dewey also makes an important distinction between educational inquiry and educational practice in his discussion of the emancipatory possibilities inherent in scientific inquiry. Inquiry makes for a more thoughtful and diverse educational practice. In a statement which resembles Popper's notion of a searchlight theory of science, Dewey writes, "Command of scientific methods and systematized subject-matter liberates individuals; it enables them to see new problems, devise new procedures, and, in general, makes for diversification rather than for set uniformity" (1929, p.12). Dewey criticizes the tendency to frame educational science merely as a means of standardizing practice, "The human desire to prove that the scientific mode of attack is really of value brings pressure to convert scientific conclusions into rules and standards of schoolroom practice" (p.18). This pressure must be resisted because a science of education does not offer simple pedagogical recipes. It furnishes epistemological tools. Dewey writes, "If we retain the

word 'rule' at all, we must say that scientific results furnish a rule for the conduct of observations and inquiries, not a rule for overt action." (p. 30). The purpose of a science in education is to offer conceptual tools for progress in educational practice. "There is no science without abstraction, and abstraction means fundamentally that certain occurrences are removed from the dimension of familiar practical experience into that of reflective or theoretical inquiry" (p. 16). An epistemology of narrative inquiry would bridge the gap between practical experience and theoretical inquiry for action researchers.

In my readings, I recognized two influential epistemological orientations in action research: objectivism and critical theory. They entail ways of thinking and speaking about education and place specific demands on action researchers and their narratives. Eventually, we will need to determine whether we can live with these demands or whether we can replace them with expectations that are more suited to our purposes.

Objectivists believe that the social world of human beings is subject to hidden lawlike relationships not of our making. In the educational sciences objectivists assume an Archimedean point by employing a scientific method that is supposedly untainted by the contingencies of life and that allows them to discover the laws that govern human learning. As a qualitative researcher, Michael Huberman (1996) asserts that social realities and patterns of human behaviour exist in an objective sense. The challenge which the researcher faces is to disentangle herself from these social realities in order to analyze and interpret them. Huberman believes that his methodology may allow researchers to objectify these social realities sufficiently to discover relationships of

cause and effect among them. In short, he argues for the possibility of a robust and rigorous empiricism which remains close to qualitative descriptions of social phenomena. Objectivist teacher action researchers accept this possibility and set out to discover instrumental blueprints for best practice in the classroom. A blueprint for action assumes an objective status insofar as it is a plan for best educational practice in most, if not all, pedagogical contexts.

In the introduction to *Curriculum action research: A handbook of methods and resources for the reflective practitioner*, McKernan (1996) describes action research as "...a practice in which no distinction is made between the practice being researched and the process of researching it" (p.3). In sharp contrast to Dewey, McKernan understands teacher research primarily in terms of its methods. The construction of theory is treated as a private activity and merits only a passing commentary in his handbook. McKernan (1996) emphasizes that action researchers "can make their own models, theories and grand designs" provided they first recognize that "...there are research techniques to be learned and mastered which will provide rich data for practitioners to analyze their curriculum problems in their attempts to improve practice" (p.260).

To McKernan (1996), method is the key to discovering scientific truths about good practice: "The action research approach which I have sketched is, when rigorously applied, just as 'scientific' and most certainly as empirical as anything worked up under quantitative hypothetico-deductive approaches" (p.228). I believe that such objectivist ambitions towards methodological and scientific rigour will fail us in our attempts to

understand context-specific curriculum problems. Nor does McKernan explain how the action researcher can translate scientific knowledge into a course of action for improved educational practices. Entangled as his text is in descriptions of objectivist methodology, McKernan foregoes an exploration of how these supposedly strategic moves for the construction and improvement of teacher knowledge and practice actually work in context.

Dewey and Popper helpfully remind us that curriculum problems are not self-evident. Our outline for a theory of narrative inquiry will signal the mutual entailment of problem and method in teacher action research. What complicates the work of action researchers is that the problematic of any social situation is always constructed by contingent human agents. The way a problem presents itself in action research depends largely on the teacher researcher's pedagogical intentions and sense of her contingent agency within the school. However, objectivism already commits the teacher researcher to the belief "...that there is always, for any classroom situation, one true set of causes, one correct explanation and one best solution" (Parker, 1997, p.25). Such a pre-understanding forgets the diversity of possible classroom situations and the dynamic role of human agents within them.

Dewey (1929) offers an incisive critique of this pre-understanding:

> ...there is a strong tendency to identify teaching ability with the use of procedures that yield immediately successful results, success being measured by such things as order in the classroom, correct recitations by pupils in assigned lessons, passing of examinations, promotion of pupils to a higher grade, etc.

For the most part, these are the standards by which a community judges the worth of a teacher. Prospective teachers come to training schools... with such ideas implicit in their minds. They want very largely to find out *how to do* things with the maximum prospect of success. Put baldly, they want recipes. Now to such persons science is of value because it puts a stamp of final approval upon this and that specific procedure. It is very easy for science to be regarded as a guarantee that goes with the sale of goods rather than as a light to the eyes and a lamp to the feet... It is prized because it is thought to give unquestionable authenticity and authority to a specific procedure to be carried out in the schoolroom. (p. 15)

Blueprints for best classroom practice fail to distinguish teachers and children from lifeless matter. I can offer you a blueprint for making a model plane. I cannot offer you a blueprint for making a socialized human being. Objectivists forget that, as Heidegger (1996) would say, "...the person exists only in carrying out intentional acts, and is thus essentially not an object" (p. 44-5). In this sense, human intentionality and human agency place us, human beings, outside the reach of any objectivist epistemology.

Action research as critical educational science "...rejects positivist notions of rationality, objectivity and truth in favour of a dialectical view of rationality" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 179). The critical teacher action researcher intends to become and remain a more conscious human agent in the daily life of school and society. A critical theory would help teachers describe coercive practices, which distort the discourse in their schools and classrooms. The critical theory would also help teachers describe the social and institutional determinants of their professional consciousness.

In essence, action researchers may employ critical theory to foreground their own historical agency, as they consciously and dialectically interrelate "theory and practice,

individual and society and retrospective understanding and prospective action" (Carr &

Kemmis, 1986, p. 187). The imperative of critical action research is the transformation of

educational practice and of collective social action through the self-critical transformation

of practitioners (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 198). This self-transformation can occur only

within a discourse community of critical others in which participants take normative

claims to validity seriously and do not objectify norms as immutable social facts

(Habermas, 1990, p. 105). Their discourse ethics respect the rule that a norm can only be

valid if the consequences of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person's

particular interests are acceptable to all the participants in a discussion (Habermas, 1990,

p. 197). When truth claims about good educational practice are uttered by people who can

exercise coercive power over their listeners, the more vulnerable partner in the

conversation may acquiesce and feign naïve acceptance, rather than publicly subject the

statement to critical examination.

Sirotnik (1991) has identified five generic questions which public school educators can

use to maintain the dialectical tension required for a critical teacher action research (p.

250-2). The first question – "What are we doing now?" – is intended to help identify

current institutional practices and action theories. The second question – "How did it

come to be this way?" – requires that normative practices and justificatory theories are

viewed as contingent social constructions and not as immutable facts so that critical

teacher action researchers may inquire into the origins of current practices and thus begin

to question their theoretical validity. Ideology critique assists in this inquiry as it attempts

to show "that the validity of a theory has not been adequately dissociated from the

context in which it emerged; that behind the back of the theory there lies hidden an inadmissible mixture of power and validity, and that it still owes its reputation to this" (Habermas, 1987, p. 116). The rational acceptance of a normative claim presumes freedom from external coercion or manipulation and from internal compulsions and self-deceptions as well (Rehg, 1994 p. 43). The third question asks, "Whose interests are, and are not, being served by the way things are?" This introduces reflections on social justice. Habermas (1990) clarifies their function as follows,

> In the sphere of ethical life, questions of justice are posed only within the horizon of questions concerning the good life, questions which have always already been answered. Under the unrelenting moralizing gaze of the participant in discourse this totality has lost its quality of naïve acceptance, and the normative power of the factual has weakened" (p.107-108).

This assumes that the moralizing gaze has not in fact been already colonized by the ideological constructs under critique. The fourth question invites critical teacher action researcher to gather relevant data about the normative practices and the normative discourse of schools in society. Critical action researchers ask, "What information and knowledge do we have (or need to get) that bear upon the issues?" Armed with this critical knowledge and educational theories which have withstood the test of ideology critique, the researchers ask, "Is this the way we want things to be?" and "What are we going to do about it?" This makes for a critical praxis which is intended to transform the sites of teacher action in accordance with theorized views of social justice.

I wonder whether this process can help us outline a theory of narrative inquiry – keeping in mind that to theorize our inquiry means telling ourselves and others what we are doing,

how we are doing it, and why we are doing it. This may sound easy but once you include storytelling in this equation, the picture gets very complicated.

Judith Newman's idea of a critical action research attributes an important heuristic function to narrative. Newman (1987) argues that teachers learn to teach by coming face to face with their implicit or previously unacknowledged beliefs about teaching, "The only route I know to uncovering our instructional assumptions is to delve beneath the surface of what we are currently doing. Critical incidents offer us one powerful way of doing just that" (p. 7). To me, the metaphor of delving and digging suggests that our practical understanding of teaching is concealed within our actions and not immediately accessible to reflection. It follows that pedagogical assumptions are always already enveloped within our actions and that critical incident narratives allow us to examine the validity of our implicit theoretical assumptions perhaps for the first time. Using critical incidents as the starting point means that action researchers spend a lot of time just delving and digging not knowing what they are necessarily looking for. Newman (1998a) tells us,

> ...the biggest obstacle for people is dealing with the uncertainty inherent in the process. You don't usually begin this kind of inquiry with a focused question. You don't know what matters, what to notice, or what to ignore. You don't know what information to collect, who to interview, where to look.

> In the beginning, you just have to do a great deal of messing around. That makes teachers very uncomfortable. At first they think I don't know what I'm doing; they distrust me and are skeptical that anything worthwhile will ever come from what a number consider a useless exercise. I continue to be supportive, yet non-directive, because I know this is likely the first time in their academic experience that they have been asked to identify and pursue a problem for themselves. Their floundering used to make me uncomfortable, and I'd rush in with suggestions in an effort to help them

over their discomfort. What I learned, however, was that I just made them more dependent on me. Now I wait out this period which, for some people, can take most of a term. However, I don't just sit back, arms folded during this time; I ask questions, I respond to theirs, I suggest things to read. I set up opportunities for people to talk to one another about their inquiries, but I leave the identifying and shaping of an inquiry to each individual. Eventually, an interesting thing happens. Vaguely discernible patterns begin to emerge for a couple of the teachers; then others begin to catch on. The teachers find themselves asking more focused questions... Their inquiries take form, and the teachers lose their sense of being at sea. (p. 15-16)

Newman's account tells of three stages in the development of this teacher group. Teachers in the group were at first skeptical. Then they floundered in their attempt to get their projects off the ground and finally, as the conversations in the group continued, recognizable research patterns began to emerge in some of their texts. Newman describes the teacher-educator as a transformative presence in this uncertain process who influences without directing the ongoing conversations of the group.

At first glance, this action research process appears improvised, messy, uncertain, highly individualistic, and rather opaque. The non-directive teacher-educator recognizes successful beginnings and signals examples of floundering action research inquiry. At the same time, the criteria for judging the purposes and the methods of this action research remain implicit. This account suggests that individual teachers have no idea how critical incident narratives might lead to practical knowledge or how research goals will emerge for the researchers out of the stories. Teachers have no sense of what matters or what to look for and yet they will eventually constitute a research collective. In the absence of an explicit description of how the research collective came to be, Newman's account remains vulnerable to the charge that the teachers eventually caught on when they

formulated action research projects which worked within the ideological framework of the teacher educator.

The relationship of the university academic to classroom teacher action researchers learning the textual moves and methods of narrative inquiry requires open dialogue about educational purposes, contradictory belief systems and implicit ideologies. Newman believes that these issues will likely emerge in the narratives. Therefore, Newman (1998a) writes of a weekend seminar with another group: "The teachers and I were ostensibly engaged in inquiry into the role of writing in action research. My covert agenda, however, was to help the teachers examine contradictions in their instructional practices." However, teachers often intuit such covert agendas and may resent the teacher-educator who has not placed all her cards on the table. Indeed, Arendt (1993) even suggests that one can teach but not educate adults (p. 195). The difference hinges on the idea of educating as leading immature human beings who are not ready for self-directed, responsible action. The authority of teachers is joined with their capacity for purposeful, coherent, and responsible *praxis* and with their responsibility for the course of things in their classrooms and the world (p. 190).

An emancipatory teacher action research narrative would be written with the purpose of identifying unexamined ideological contradictions which diminish our capacity for educational praxis. This is, of course, Newman's goal. Perhaps, understanding classroom conditions and subjecting normative claims about teaching and schooling to ideology critique are pre-requisite gestures to weakening the power of the factual and assuming

responsibility for our agency in the course of events. An explicitly theorized teacher action research can come into being when we begin to articulate our purposes for teacher narrative. For precisely this reason Sirotnik (1991) draws on the resources of critical theory to suggest the five aforementioned questions. They propose a research agenda for an action research collective which can base its claim to authority at least in part on a commitment to responsible social action.

When the action researcher turns storyteller and narrativizes a critical incident he or she intends to problematize, interrupt, and reshape an educational or institutional practice. In essence, the action researcher's narrative is a discursive act intended to engage the attention of a research community of critical others. In this way, action research may problematize educational practices to make their implicit purposes and functions accessible to the possibility of reflective thought and/or ideology critique. Keeping in mind the imperative of praxis, it follows that the ultimate meaning and value of an action research program would show itself in how the educational practices of the discourse community evolve in tandem with its critical narratives. Action research occurs therefore by definition only within a professional community. Private reflection and strategic planning, in which teachers must necessarily engage to manage their classrooms, is not action research until a problem is constructed as relevant or critical to the educational practices of a professional discourse community.

In narrative inquiry, the action researcher uses language to fabricate a text out of her experiences. The outline of a narrative inquiry may look somewhat like this: Of the many

episodes that occur in the fast-paced life of a classroom the action researcher chooses certain moments, puts them into words, arranges these in a recognizable narrative structure, and presents the text as a meaningful experience. However, the principle of selection operating in the act of writing cannot be taken for granted because it represents a theoretical pre-commitment on the part of the researcher. I suggest, a critical and theorized teacher action research might profitably describe these ideological pre-commitments as expressions of a language game, which always already structures the researcher's inquiry.

Rorty (1989) employs the idea of "language game" to suggest that a way of speaking is by definition context-dependent and purpose-relative. The critical incident narratives of teacher action research move within language games which allow the researcher to describe curriculum problems and to move them into the dimension of theoretical inquiry. A theorized action research would foreground its language games and detail how its acts of speech, reflection, and pedagogy entail each other. For this reason, teacher action researchers are interested in describing the language games of their discourse community. For this reason, they ask questions such as "Why do you talk that way?" rather than merely "How do you know?" They might even agree with Rorty (1989) who boldly argues "that what matters in the end are changes in the vocabulary rather than changes in belief, changes in truth-value candidates rather than assignments of truth-value" (p. 48).

Following Rorty's suggestion, I could write a narrative showing that talk of standardized tests and blueprints for instrumental action in the classroom entail ways of engaging with children as dehumanized objects. A Habermasian ideology critique would emphasize that the normative claims of such a practice originate in a coercive speech situation. In a Rortian move, the action research narrative would show the destructive potential of such ways of describing children and would articulate a way of speaking, thinking, and acting which is arguably more ethical and more faithful to the self-image of our professional culture.

As we have seen, objectivist epistemologies forego inquiry into the purposes of human action in favor of a search for the one best instrumental strategy in attaining an educational purpose. The search for universal rules of best classroom practice falls outside of the teacher action research agenda. Critical reflection may be described as a delving beneath the surface of what we are doing in the sense that an explicit line of questioning, such as ideology critique, brings us face to face with the conflicting language games which are inscribing and directing our practices. As Rorty (1989) tells us, such inquiry is moral because it *"...takes the form of an answer to the question 'Who are we, how did we come to be what we are, and what might we become?' rather than an answer to the question 'What rules should dictate my actions?'"* (p. 60). Connelly & Clandinin have researched how our narratives of experience may help us respond to such questions.

Connelly & Clandinin (1990) suggest that the teacher action research narrative, as a discursive act and as a heuristic process, "...names the structured quality of experience to

be studied, and ...names the patterns of inquiry for its study." (p. 2) As university-based researchers working with classroom practitioners, the authors emphasize "a process of collaboration involving mutual storytelling and restorying as the research proceeds" (p.4). This occurs in a community of inquiry where all participants may narrate and voice the meaning of their experiences. Connelly & Clandinin differentiate empirical narratives which are plausible from fictional narrative which contain fantasy as an invitational element. The empirical narrative seems plausible and true to the reader who would say, "I can see that happening" (p. 8). This verisimilitude is its invitational element. Empirical narrative allows the reader-researcher to focus on the experiential qualities of selected events in a process termed "burrowing." We remember, of course, Newman's metaphor of "delving beneath the surface of what we are currently doing" to explore moments of surprise or dissatisfaction in classroom practice. Connelly & Clandinin are interested in describing the emotional, moral, and aesthetic qualities of the selected event in order to explore "why the event is associated with these feelings and what their origins might be" (p.11). The researchers emphasize the transformative possibilities inherent in storying and restorying. They do not appeal directly to a critical theory. Instead, they "...imagine that stories will allow us to re-imagine schools, universities and other places that are more educative for children and for all of us" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998, p. 253).

While the act of writing may remain private, the action research text – as an adjunct to praxis within a discourse community – is necessarily made visible to a public reading. Therefore, Connelly and Clandinin (1991) suggest that the narrative writer may assess a manuscript by having another participant read the account and respond to such questions

as "What do you make of it for your teaching (or other) situation?" (p. 135). I thought that asking such a question of a group of teachers may help me better understand the possible role of narrative inquiry in the educational thinking of teachers.

So far in this chapter I have presented a collection of theoretical claims made on behalf of narrative inquiry and action research. These claims may be summarized as follows. Narrative inquiry is a dynamic interplay of two currents: self-explorative writing and interrogative reading. The purpose of the action research narrative is to create opportunities for such interplay. We assume the possibility of a critical incident narrative that allows us to represent and question the normal flow of our day-to-day school activity and the ways in which the institutional discourse continuously shapes or influences our professional subjectivity. Critical incidents may foreground the language game (Rorty, 1989) or the metanarrative (Lyotard, 1993) which structures the institutional discourse about educational purposes, values, beliefs, and understandings. Our stories would weaken the normative power of the factual.

The critical incident narrative would also diagnose comforting and dangerous self-deceptions of the kind found in narratives such as the film *To sir with love*. They suggest the ideal of the heroic teacher who single-handedly turns around a chaotic classroom situation and inspires misfits to become productive members of society. In the real world, the teacher may lead but cannot produce classroom events. Motivated, skilled, and caring teachers usually make a difference in the lives of their students. However, this difference will not always be a predetermined outcome or a fairy-tale ending. To violate our

conventional impulse toward narrative unity, exemplified by what Connelly & Clandinin call "the Hollywood plot," our disruptive action research narrative would speak about the dialectical contradictions and instabilities of any situation and the dynamics of possibility and contingency within it.

Our representations of living human agents in narrative must not reduce them to pawns or actors we determine to suit our rhetorical purposes. Winter (1986) refers to the unresolved plurality in the meanings of action research narrative saying, "it is not to be taken as imparting knowledge about reality but as raising questions about reality" (p. 177). While an ambition of Connelly & Clandinin's "empirical narrative" may be to describe experiences and/or situations in a plausible manner (to its readers), Winter (1986) suggests that "the problem with apparently descriptive writing is that it perpetuates the common-sense idea that writers could and should simply reflect reality" (p. 178). This is, I believe, an untenable objectivist ambition. In my understanding of narrative inquiry as a form of action research, writing and reading are unstable self-exploratory and reflexive acts.

Gadamer (1989) tells us that a text always surpasses its author and that therefore reading is always a productive and not a reproductive act (p. 296). In short, there are no points of privileged access to the true meaning of a text, not even for the author. Meaning is always tentatively constructed in the acts of writing and (re)reading the text. Therefore, the meaning of a text always remains inherently unstable because it is always actively constructed and contextualized within the experience of the reader. The action research

project I will now introduce hinges on the plurality of reading responses that will necessarily emerge as people within a research collective engage with and construct action research narratives for each other.

I will now explicitly outline the action research process of this study and then clarify the role of the research collective. The process contains the following strands:

1. observations of teacher action constructed within narrative,

2. critical reflection on educational practice or teacher action,

3. action plans arising out of these reflections.

The narratives represent attempts on my part to describe, explore and think about three forms of teacher practice: the aggressive and systematic intimidation of non-compliant children, the studied manipulation and management of children's behaviour, and the construction of a classroom curriculum which seeks to invite and engage children in meaningful learning. In the course of my professional development and the ongoing formation of my subjectivity as a public school teacher, I needed to confront and interpret these practices which reflect powerful currents in the institutional culture(s) in which I have participated for the last fourteen years. This action research project invites colleagues to respond to my narrativized representations of these currents. I believe their reading-responses will help me understand these influences on my subjectivity and my practice.

For the purposes of my research, I first turned to teachers who had already worked with me in the now disbanded Seven Oaks School division teacher action research cohort. Of

the ten people I asked to participate three immediately accepted. The seven who declined cited reasons such as lack of time and personal commitments. Then, I telephoned fifteen colleagues, twelve of whom agreed to participate. Most of the participants asked to have their identity concealed in the published document. I believe this allowed the participants to think and write more spontaneously. As promised, I assigned these participants pseudonyms. For the same reason, I am also withholding personal information such as age and years of teaching experience. I will say that the youngest participant was a student teacher in his final year of undergraduate studies. One teacher had two years of classroom experience. The other participants had been teaching for at least ten years. Even though most of the participants wished to remain anonymous, they still expressed interest in reading each other's responses. The thesis will be a public document for all teachers interested in action research and specifically for the teachers at my school who are about to form a collective of action researchers.

I met with the participants in this study individually to show them the narratives which are reproduced in the following chapters. Our conversation also turned to the instructions. They were as follows:

> While you read each narrative for the first time, please jot down thoughts and reactions (as they occur to you) in the right-hand margin.
> Then, write a more considered response/interpretation of each narrative. Keeping in mind the following issues may assist you:

1. Does this story ring true to life for you? If so, you might want to comment on some passages, descriptions or phrases that seem especially interesting to you. If not, please explain your response.
2. To what extent does this story offer insights into teaching and learning which are of value or interest to you as an educator? Please comment on these insights.

3. Is there anything in this story that resonates with your own experiences of teaching and learning, of child-adult relationships, of relationships with other educators?

4. Please comment on the potential usefulness of this story as a way of promoting meaningful professional dialogue among teachers.

Thus, I asked each participant to write two commentaries: an ongoing or running commentary to be written in the right-hand margin of the page, as the reader made her way through the text, and a final commentary to be written after reading each narrative. I hoped that the marginalia would offer us a glimpse of each reader's wandering viewpoint. Iser (1978) theorizes that the reader moves or travels through the text which can never be perceived in its totality and "can only be imagined by way of different consecutive phases of reading" and that "there is a moving viewpoint which travels along inside that which it has to apprehend" (p. 109). This journey is not a matter of decoding the text or achieving a pure perception of it. That is impossible because the reader will always encounter what we may call ambiguities, blanks, gaps, or places of indeterminancy in any text. In the act of grasping the text, the reader bombards the constitutive blank with interpretative projections which she continually readjusts in her ongoing interaction with the text in order to experience something previously not within her experience (p. 167). The place for the reader within the text are indeed these blanks which the reader fills in. The concluding commentary might allow the participants to describe whether readjusting their interpretative projections helped them think differently about their teaching. Such readjustments would be a sign of the transformational agency of narrative which helps us to "re-imagine schools and universities" and to act based on these imaginings. I believe this agency defines the proper function of the action research narrative.

In the preceding pages, I have made much of the importance of an action research collective. Most of the participants requested anonymity and did not yet share their reading-responses with each other. However, they used the opportunity provided to them in the study to write openly about their views and in some cases about the ideological frameworks within which they placed the narratives. Their responses suggest possibilities for a critical conversation. I hope that the published thesis will be a place where the participants can see such possibilities. The primary purpose of the published document will be provide teachers who participated in this study a point of entry into the action research collective(s) they are forming at our school.

As we read and re-read the narratives and the participants' responses, we may ask how the acts of writing and reading narrative help us think about our teaching practices? In this way, our primary concern will not be the meaning of the texts but their effects (Iser, 1978, p. 54).

Chapter three:

Narrative inquiry as a recognition of human plurality

During the first two years of my teaching career, I used to think of the children in my classroom in the singular. I related to them as one group, expecting them to march through the Français de base curriculum in lock-step formation. They memorized dialogues, vocabulary, grammar rules, and irregular French verbs for the weekly tests. I conscientiously corrected and marked their oral and their written work. The program ran like clockwork. However, a few students always marched to a different drum. In my view, this merely reflected their lack of self-discipline and there was no need to find other ways of drawing them into my second-language program. At this school, students who failed to participate appropriately were sent to the "responsibility room" during the lunch hour for a detention. Teachers and administrators subscribed to a singular set of expectations or standards that defined the framework of acceptability at this school. For a short time, this apparent unanimity was a source of pride for me – until I began to think about the possible consequences of a pedagogical attitude which discounts human plurality.

Greene (1995) explains this term as follows,

> "Plurality" is "the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live." Even though we are on a common ground, we have different locations on that ground, and each one "sees or hears from a different position" (Arendt, 1958, p.57). Any object – a classroom, a neighborhood street, a field of flowers – shows itself differently to each spectator. The reality of that object arises out of the sum total of its appearances to all who view it. Thinking of those

> spectators as participants in an ongoing dialogue, each one speaking out of
> a distinct perspective and yet open to those around, I find a kind of
> paradigm for what I have in mind. (p. 156)

Plurality means that the students and I are always distinct lives converging in a shared space during the school day. In my mind, Greene also foregrounds the importance of the common object which comes into being as different perspectives enter into the ongoing dialogue of the group in speech and action. This common object is the educational experience constructed by the children and me. As I am writing this, her statement also helps me think about situating my pedagogy as a series of speech acts within the classroom conversation fully knowing that this conversation entails multiple perspectives and that my pedagogy needs to relate and respond to the children's speech and action in order to remain in the conversation.

The ugly face of a singular school culture – which negates plurality – presented itself to me rather unexpectedly in the course of two conversations with a thirty-year veteran, who worked down the hall from me. Word had it that he was working with a particularly difficult group of grade eight students. Reading at my desk while there were no students in my classroom, I suddenly heard him screaming. I clearly made out the words "slut" and "loser." In disbelief, I walked into the hallway and saw a thirteen-year-old girl storm out of the classroom, slamming the door behind her. He pushed the door wide open, stepped into the corridor and shouted after her, "With you gone I'll finally get around to teaching my class!" The girl ran out the main entrance of the school, as his words echoed in the hallway.

"What's happening?" I asked him.

"I'm not going to put up with the likes of her. She can come back when she knows who is boss... and don't you have some worksheets to run off?" he inquired sarcastically. He clearly resented my question.

"I am going to ask the chief to talk to you," were my last words to him that morning. I felt there was nothing I could say or do to help him understand my viewpoint.

When I spoke to the principal a few hours later, he thanked me for telling him what had happened and asked me to forget the matter now. Two days later, the teacher approached me in the staffroom, trying to give me the benefit of his life experience, "With a few more years of teaching under your belt you'll realize that some kids just can't be helped. You'll have to sacrifice them to teach those kids that are willing to learn."

I offered no reply. His words led me to question my initial enthusiasm for our efficiently run school. I remembered the words of a university teacher, Elizabeth Peters, who had repeatedly told me, "We don't teach subjects. We teach children." Today, when I think of school children, I think of individual human beings negotiating common purposes. I think of myself, as their teacher, making those purposes available to individuals as participants in a collective. Today I am sure that the curriculum as a series of activities leading to standardized learning outcomes represents a totalizing gesture that negates individual and necessarily differing ways of experiencing classroom activities. In fact, a condition for

the possibility of shared or common educational experiences in a classroom is open dialogue. In the arrogant act of trying to adjudicate this conversation, a teacher or a student (or a group of students) may effectively create a totalitarian classroom experience. Coercion, intimidation, and abuse in subtle or more explicit forms are strategies for maintaining the position of the adjudicator. It did not take me long to come to the belief that the abuse which the thirteen-year-old had suffered at the hands of her classroom teacher was deemed an unfortunate but necessary measure among the staff. When the penny dropped, I decided it was time for me to look for another school.

This particular experience brought back numerous memories of my own life as a school child. One such memory is constructed in the first narrative I offered the readers in the research group. The characters of this story appear extremely intransigent, intolerant of difference, and incapable of dialogue. Their actions are rash and thoughtless and they consistently forget to recognize other people's intentions and perspectives. With very few exceptions, the characters speak only to announce what they are going to do to an *other*.

I had wanted the reader to view the events as an obvious example of a speech situation gone wrong and to reflectively examine the dynamics of a speech situation rife with coercive practices. The lack of reflexivity on the part of the characters and their extreme behaviour is intended to foreground this issue in the mind of the reader. As the narrating action researcher, I am inextricably involved with the other characters of the story. I become one of the characters, a construct within the narrative. Ricoeur (1994) theorizes, "The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her

narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character" (p. 147-8). Therefore, I have to wonder in what sense this story constructs an identity for the narrator as a teacher action researcher who represents and inquires into ideologically distorted speech situations.

The presence of numerous authors in the footnotes makes for a heterogeneous or uneven text incorporating contradictory statements. I believe that this unevenness foregrounds the plurality of any community of readers and authors. We wish to understand how our stories and our responses to them may become "the basis of our inquiry into curriculum." Our inquiries need to recognize contingency, plurality, and difference as inherent to the human condition. My decision to situate the narratives and the reading-responses as part of the main text of this thesis, rather than as data or reference material in an appendix, reflects a pre-commitment to the value of dialogic partnership in curriculum inquiry. In the course of this dialogic partnership, we reconstruct each other's experiences understanding that our individual viewpoints cannot capture a pure perception of the other's experience and that as an interpretative activity, our reading-response "will contain a view of others, and, unavoidably, also an image of ourselves" (Iser, 1978, p. 166). And then, we may ask: What modes of existence are researched in the narrative and in our responses to it? How are people situated to each other in these modes? (Foucault, 1977, p.138)

Teachers interpreting critical incident narratives in a group discussion will project images of themselves into this conversation. In its course, the speakers will moderate their

statements as they became conscious of the way these images are received by members of the group. Indeed, the speaker's sense of her audience will – at least in part – determine how she publicly interprets the narrative or whether an interpretation is offered at all. Anonymity allowed some of the readers to exclude considerations of audience while they responded to the narratives. Other readers insisted on using their names because they wish to speak with each other and possible readers of this thesis. We may read the footnotes as isolated dialogues individual readers are having with the text. However, juxtaposing these dialogues and looking for points where their thematic trajectories intersect allows us to imagine the statements these teachers may have offered each other in an open discussion.

Narrative: Teaching other people's children

I spent one month of my grade-three year in another school.[1] In response to a family emergency, my parents had sent me to visit my Aunt Maria and Uncle Tony in Saarbruecken.[2],[3],[4],[5],[6]

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[1] I was an armed-forces "brat" and spent my entire education in eight different schools – often moving mid-term. This brought back memories about those times. (Jane Ayers)

[2] Temporary residence makes the enforcement of rules and regulations difficult. (Andrew Jackson)

[3] Poor kid. Couldn't have been easy to do this. (Mary Parker)

[4] The receiving teacher should be made aware of the kind of emergency. This will help that teacher work more effectively with the student. (Ron Kofman)

[5] What family emergency? (Jennifer Harcourt)

I did not like the temporary classroom situation into which I had been cast.[7], [8] My new teacher, Frau Schmidt, ran a taut ship and assigned large amounts of math homework. [9] Most of the children in the class were extremely compliant and actually working hard on memorizing multiplication tables, an activity which I detested.[10], [11], [12], [13], [14]

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[6] Reminds me of kids who deal with instability in their lives and the number of moves they might make. (Orysia Hull)

[7] U.S.A – when I spent a couple of months in a grade four temporary classroom in New York (Heather Kowalchuk)

[8] This story reminds me that I took grade five at another village where my sister was teaching at the time. A village in the mountainous area of the province in which I lived. A very good experience for me! (Gianfranco Riva)

[9] Oh! How I can relate to this! It is just that it was so much a reflection of my own first learning experiences. I was schooled at home; learning was fun and intrinsic to activity. "Count the eggs"; mum reciting poetry from memory as I turned the separator or worked the paddles on the washing machine or butter churner. Rhythm, purpose, games, joy, fun. (Marlene Milne)

[10] Learning vs. memorization (Andrew Jackson)

[11] Must have been hard for the student to concentrate on schoolwork because what was happening for him/her at home. (Mary Parker)

[12] Is this a student who needs a different approach to the program? Why were the students so keen? I also question the large amount of math homework... drill'n kill? (Ron Kofman)

It appeared that students had to complete all their homework.[15] The punishment for an unfinished assignment meant having to do twice the amount for the next day.[16], [17], [18] Nonetheless, I decided to take a vacation from mathematics and all manner of homework.[19], [20]

Frau Schmidt's reaction did not surprise me when I told her that I had spent the entire evening playing tennis with Uncle Tony. She responded resolutely, "Well, you now owe me twice the amount of yesterday's homework. Twenty-five questions multiplied by two

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[13] Hates math or just tables? (Jennifer Harcourt)

[14] Obviously a 100% percent teacher-directed learning environment and a restricted body of knowledge. (Gianfranco Riva)

[15] Children need time to be children. Society and parents today tend to push them into being adults before their time. Large amounts of homework is busy work. Knowledge can be demonstrated by doing a small number correctly – consistently. Memorization is just that. It does not demonstrate true understanding or true knowledge. (Jane Ayers)

[16] Unfair – leads to decision of all or none – can't do it, quit. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[17] Temporary situation – consequences short-lived. (Jennifer Harcourt)

[18] Reminds me of the "old" days. (Orysia Hull)

[19] Took a lot of courage to say forget it to the homework. Don't know if I could have done that. (Mary Parker)

[20] Why did you take a vacation from math? Will you only work for a teacher you like? (Mike Smythe)

make fifty. Now add the twenty-five questions which I will assign later today. This amounts to seventy-five questions tonight!" And turning to the other children in the class she added, "You see it doesn't pay to procrastinate!"[21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29]

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[21] School formalized and so structured. Punishment for freedom, no leeway. By that I don't mean that I was not a good student; everything was so easy to being a "good" student. I mean I didn't like it. I still don't. They (admin) still weigh my classes with kids that "don't fit" multiple repeaters, "behavioral problems" I don't necessarily succeed though. Who's to define success? (Marlene Milne)

[22] Yeah! Right! That is 75 questions I'll never do. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[23] Didn't Frau Schmidt realize some of the circumstances of the child's life? However, she probably felt that what she was doing was right. Ha! (Mary Parker)

[24] I once tried to publicly teach one student a lesson – I got burnt. (Mike Smythe)

[25] I, as a teacher, would have to weigh the importance of the given assignment. Does this student not do homework on a regular basis? We all need to take a vacation from work at times! As a teacher, I do not have the energy to waste "freaking out" just because I did not do their work. Did the student get the desired reaction from the teacher? I would want Maria to phone me to discuss the situation. (Ron Kofman)

[26] Unusual response? Usually compliant? Response to forced exile from family. Power of rebellion! Passive aggressive or just easygoing child. Public humiliation – no cousins in school? (Jennifer Harcourt)

[27] This is about compliance not learning. Very soon, the accumulated homework will become impossible to do because of the huge number of questions. This is reminding me of the practice of keeping students for detention who are late. A couple of skipped

Aunt Maria reacted with indignation to the barbaric tactics of this teacher and advised me

to forget about this "crazy assignment" and go play with my friends instead.[30], [31], [32], [33],

[34] [35] [36]

The next morning my teacher asked to see my math notebook and with a threatening

undertone in her voice doubled my assignment again, "Seventy-five multiplied by two

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detentions and the number of minutes owed is so huge that students opt not to come to

school at all if they are going to be late. The policy, rather than encouraging, deters or

worsens the behaviour once the student has chosen not to comply. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[28] Raising stakes. (Orysia Hull)

[29] This suggests that this child had a different experience in his normal environment. A

punitive rather than a reward-based system. The child shows courage and a definite lack

of interest in school; he sees this situation as a holiday. School is not relevant, especially

in the form it takes here. (Gianfranco Riva)

[30] Viva Maria! Permission to BE ONESELF (Marlene Milne)

[31] Home vs. school, dialogue? (Andrew Jackson)

[32] Smart aunt! (Heather Kowalchuk)

[33] What an aunt! I like her. (Mary Parker)

[34] Nice to have a parent advocate for a kid. (Mike Smythe)

[35] Teacher not supported at home. (Jennifer Harcourt)

[36] Message that school isn't important. (Orysia Hull)

makes one hundred and fifty, add twenty-five questions, tonight's homework, this will make one hundred and seventy-five."[37], [38], [39], [40], [41], [42]

My aunt laughed at what she called "the unbelievable stupidity of this person"[43], [44], [45] and suggested, "Do what you like but let your conscience be your guide." My conscience advised me to go play with my friends.[46], [47], [48], [49], [50]

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[37] OK. Ask my husband. In some cases, I am anal-retentive – e.g. – paying bills and house maintenance. That has nothing to do with my real life? Self? This is DRACONIAN. What is this so-called "teacher" trying to prove? This has fuck all to do with learning of any sort. It makes me **SO** ANGRY! (Marlene Milne)

[38] Hey! We are actually doing math. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[39] Who's going to win? (Mary Parker)

[40] Teacher needs to take a vacation… I know the name of a good doctor. (Ron Kofman)

[41] Subject's emotion not evident – fear: leaving family, new class, strict teacher – anger: shunned by teacher – loneliness: away from family (Jennifer Harcourt)

[42] Useless consequence (Orysia Hull)

[43] This "parent" could have handled it differently. Her attitude shows a real lack of respect for the teacher and for her goals. They were working at cross-purposes – far more effective to work as a team! (Jane Ayers)

[44] No attempt to meet unreasonable demands. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[45] Wise Aunt. (Mary Parker)

[46] RIGHT! (Marlene Milne)

For three days the size of my homework continued to increase exponentially until Frau Schmidt decided to write me off as a lost cause and to ignore my presence in her classroom altogether.[51], [52], [53], [54], [55], [56] [57], [58], [59], [60]

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[47] After Aunt Maria stopped laughing, she should have given the teacher a call. Maria is not being consistent here. She has transferred responsibility from herself to the child. The teacher will not win here. (Ron Kofman)

[48] Given the choice of 175 math questions the least painful choice for the moment would be playing with friends. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[49] Was it your conscience or your sense of taking a stand or did you not like math? (Samantha Phillips)

[50] Aunt Maria's reaction is somewhat simplistic. She puts her nephew in a difficult situation without attempting to sort things out in a mature way with the teacher. (Gianfranco Riva)

[51] Pyhrric victory? What is the lesson here? Us and them? In Highschool – it was – do the stuff and think with like-minded souls. (Marlene Milne)

[52] Call home and explain? Loss of consistency (Andrew Jackson)

[53] Saw it coming. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[54] I keep wondering what Frau Schmidt is thinking and how she's justifying this. (Mary Parker)

[55] You can't demand compliance. You will always be defeated. (Mike Smythe)

Aunt Alexandra showed up unexpectedly on the last day of my stay in Saarbruecken. To my surprise, she even went to the trouble of fetching me at school where she spoke with Frau Schmidt for a few minutes in the staff room. [61], [62], [63], [64]

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[56] I should have taken a different approach long ago. I do not agree with the teacher – just ignore the student all together. A simple bullet between the eyes would be enough! You still with me Matt? (Ron Kofman)

[57] This child was "written off" because he/she did not comply. It has nothing to do with ability – although at no time should a child be "written off" (Elizabeth Fromm)

[58] Mixed message, lack of respect for what teacher was trying to accomplish. (Orysia Hull)

[59] Hey, this is how kids learn to work the system. (Samantha Phillips)

[60] The punishment system devised by the teacher is unrealistic and the exponential increase in the homework (punishment) turns into a ridiculous exercise. (Gianfranco Riva)

[61] This was not what I expected from the Aunt. But again. I relate to my own learning experiences: my mum was a great "teacher" but relinquished "authority" once I was in the "system." It was the same with music for me. I went in all cases from JOY to HAVING MY KNUCKLES RAPPED. LITERALLY. (Marlene Milne)

[62] I'd do this too. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[63] Sounds intriguing. What happened? Whose side is she on? (Mary Parker)

[64] Parental support! (Samantha Phillips)

I am not sure what passed between the two adults, as they spoke in private conference.[65],

[66] Aunt Alexandra left the staff room visibly angry. She gripped my right hand, and walked quickly with a resolute gait, dragging me behind her out the door and down the street towards the railway station.[67], [68]

"My dear young man, this will be the last time you decide to run circles around any teacher! I am on to you! You are going to learn those times tables even if it kills you!"[69],

[70] [71] [72]

I sat facing her in the first-class compartment of a slow moving train. She fixed her eyes on me and started firing questions at me: five times eight, seven times eight, etc. My

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[65] Establishment of communication is good. (Andrew Jackson)

[66] No student-led conferences or even student involvement (Samantha Phillips)

[67] I guess that answers my question. What a shame! (Mary Parker)

[68] I am sure I would be just as upset. (Ron Kofman)

[69] Support for the teacher but learning became a punishment and a negative experience. Would child remember the situation or the answers? (Jane Ayers)

[70] Poor kid! (Mary Parker)

[71] Your aunt learned from Frau Schmidt. (Mike Smythe)

[72] I don't know the real situation or what was said in the conference. It's difficult for me to assess. (Ron Kofman)

usually incorrect answers were always preceded by a long, hesitant silence, which Aunt Alexandra misconstrued as sullen defiance.[73]

She decided to be strict, "Each wrong answer deserves a slap in the face. More than four seconds of silence after my question will count as an incorrect reply." [74], [75], [76] The speed, but not the accuracy of my responses improved and, true to her word, she followed through with the "consequence."[77], [78], [79] Her timing was accurate. After exactly four

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[73] Intimidating presence (Jennifer Harcourt)

[74] Harsh punishment is bad. Her action is consistent but too harsh – consequence is not appropriate to behaviour. (Andrew Jackson)

[75] This is totally unreasonable! (Heather Kowalchuk)

[76] This is drastic. Do we need to take such drastic measures to have compliant students? (Samantha Phillips)

[77] Discipline. Yes, again. As my parents and I encountered – and this is really interesting. I had never before thought that <u>they</u> became "conditioned", too. Hmmm. We were all pretty "free" in an unusual way. My dad didn't even have to go to war. We were isolated in the extreme. I did not (can you believe) become aware of (e.g.) Jews till college. But, entering college, I was aware of CLASS, for the first time. "Have" and "have nots." I was a scholarship student from the ass-end of the city. Ironically, where I teach now. (Marlene Milne)

[78] Alexandra – forgive me Matt – should take a more understanding approach. (Ron Kofman)

seconds of silence, I received a hard slap to which she helpfully added the correct answer encouraging me to memorize it because "the question would come up again soon."[80], [81],

[82], [83], [84], [85]

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[79] This is a behaviour mod approach. Aunt Alexandra believes the child will try harder to avoid a painful consequence. Under this kind of pressure, I believe a child would learn less not more. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[80] The writer and I are of another generation who quite regularly were punished for infringements, and took it as a given. For years, maybe still, I became more "tractable"

[81] WOW! (Sally Jackson)

[82] Those math facts must have been very important to learn! I like Aunt Maria better. Who is Aunt Alexandra? I really don't like her. Was she acting this way because she was embarrassed by what the teacher had told her and felt it somehow reflected "badly" on her? I can picture her staring at her watch and timing the poor boy. What did the other people in the train compartment think? (Mary Parker)

[83] You can't be serious! Aunt Alexandra also needs to see a doctor. (Perhaps it is Aunt Alexandra who should get the bullet.) I know this does happen, but I like to believe only on TV. Both my children had trouble learning their times tables, but I took a slow relaxed pace. It went just fine. (Ron Kofman)

[84] What is your response? – cry, protest, accept (Jennifer Harcourt)

[85] Aunt Alexandra appears to be a carbon copy of the teacher in the role of a parent. She represents a throwback from the past, when parents (usually) went along wholeheartedly with authority figures such as teachers. Children in that case, as a general rule, had no

As the train pulled into Cologne, Aunt Alexandra decided to grant herself and me a five-minute recess.[86] She did not say a word. Pensively I observed travelers assembling on the platform and then getting on board.[87],[88]

I was thinking about the remaining thirty minutes of our train journey when three obviously drunk members of a bowling team[89] entered our first-class compartment. They were in a jovial mood, exchanging jokes, and speaking the plebeian Cologne-dialect, which identified them to my aunt as members of the local "proletariat."[90],[91],[92],[93]

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rights and their opinions carried no weight with respect to an adult especially in position of authority. Aunt Alexandra, the quintessential reactionary figure. (Gianfranco Riva)

[86] How come? She probably needed a break. Don't think it was out of compassion for the boy. (Mary Parker)

[87] No <u>dialogue</u> from child – "seen and not heard" with family, teacher, friends, drunk, mother (Jennifer Harcourt)

[88] Shunning (Jennifer Harcourt)

[89] Third or forth stereotype in this piece. Is it necessary? (Orysia Hull)

[90] This could be good! (Mary Parker)

[91] That they were working class individuals would not concern me (I was raised in the Point Douglas area.) I would be concerned if their behaviour turned inappropriate. (Ron Kofman)

[92] uh-oh! (Samantha Phillips)

As the train pulled out of the station, Alexandra resumed her math lesson in the same manner as before, until one of the three men took a marked interest in her pedagogical efforts. He staggered over to her. With stinking breath and slurred speech he exclaimed, "Next time you hit that child you will be dealing with me."[94], [95], [96], [97], [98]

Then everything happened quickly. She fired the most difficult question she could think of in my direction, "How much is seven times eight?" and, not even waiting four seconds for my answer raised her right hand and struck me.[99], [100] The drunken man made a fist,

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[93] This scene alludes to stereotyping: drunk = low class and to a Robin Hood kind of social justice. Use of dialect is synonymous with low class. (Gianfranco Riva)

[94] Interesting that the "facilitator" is "drunk." Somehow – I don't know quite – got to do with visceral response. Hitting her is not really "better" than hitting him. Maybe I feel guilty and responsible for my aunt's (identification) condition? How does this end? (Marlene Milne)

[95] Thank you sir. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[96] Good for him!!! I wonder what the boy thought of this. Did he feel he was being rescued or did he think it would make matters worse? (Mary Parker)

[97] Nice to have a stranger advocate for a kid. (Mike Smythe)

[98] Robin Hood! Drunkenness here is symbolic of removing class stratification and social pressures allowing a sensible behaviour to prevail. (Gianfranco Riva)

[99] Poor judgement or blatant aggravation of drunk. (Jennifer Harcourt)

aimed and resolutely directed his fist into one of my aunt's eyes.[101], [102], [103] I forgot which one. She teetered and fell down. It took her a while to get up off the ground.[104]

As Alexandra was struggling to assume a vertical position, the man turned to me and asked, " Who is this idiot?"[105]

"My aunt. She is taking me home."

"If you want me to, I'll stay by your side until you get home."[106]

On hearing this, Aunt Alexandra uttered a piercing scream, "Don't go with this strange man!" staggered out of the compartment and called for the conductor.[107] My saviour[108]

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[100] Commentary: corporal punishment teaches kids it's ok to hit. Violence begets violence (Samantha Phillips)

[101] I remember thinking hurrah! No more abuse. But do two wrongs make a right? This was very unpleasant and uncomfortable for me as well as for the student! (Jane Ayers)

[102] This is what I was talking about – see footnote 91. (Ron Kofman)

[103] Violence begets violence – child protection issue? (Orysia Hull)

[104] Wow! Super! I'm not a violent person but she sure had it coming. (Mary Parker)

[105] Can imagine the silence after this comment. (Mary Parker)

[106] Sounds like a good guy. (Mary Parker)

[107] Raising the levels of threats (Orysia Hull)

[108] Savior or villain? (Jennifer Harcourt)

was arrested at the next train station...[109] Then she sank into a sullen silence. The

punished eye had begun to turn a purplish blue and to swell by the time we arrived in

Bonn.[110], [111]

My mother greeted us at the train station, took one look at her, and asked, "W H A T

happened to you?"[112], [113]

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[109] Too bad he was arrested. Says something of the society of that time – okay to slap a

child around. (Mary Parker)

[110] Oh. Oh dear. This is terrible – in its most literal sense scenario. SO SAD!!! The child

is forever guilty, blamed: Aunt is hurt, "savior is arrested, Mother is made to feel

irresponsible. OH SHIT. What that child must FEEL! That she/he ever took to learning at

all would take a remarkable resilience. (Marlene Milne)

[111] I found this narrative the most thought provoking of the three. I could identify with the

child and wondered at the lack of expressed emotion. I would remember a childhood

incident mainly by the emotions I felt at the time (fear, loneliness, anger) (Jennifer

Harcourt)

[112] Yes as teacher's we do have an awesome responsibility...teaching other people's

children. Frau Schmidt sounded like a master transmission teacher. Why did she assign ·

so much Math homework? Was she preparing her students to write the standards tests?

Aunt Maria and Uncle Tony sounded like wonderful relatives who saw the value of time

spent together and with friends. Where did Aunt Alexandra come from? The sudden

disappearance of Aunt Maria and Uncle Tony made me wonder, "Did Frau Schmidt have

them detained for questioning?" Certainly, this month in grade three was not remembered

Alexandra responded, "This is what happens when you try to teach other people's children."[114], [115], [116], [117], [118], [119], [120], [121], [122], [123], [124], [125]

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with fondness. In times of family emergencies, teachers are called upon to be understanding and somewhat empathetic. Have Aunt Maria, Uncle Tony, and their nephew met with Frau Schmidt to give her an understanding of the emergency? Home school communication is important. Children do not always understand the language caregivers and parents use. Did the young man understand the message, "Do what you like but let your conscience be your guide?" Messages from school can place undue hardships on students. The potential for this story lies in a discussion about what does teaching and learning look like? What is teaching all about? Is it about pencil paper tasks, homework, consequences, uniformity, standards, and disengagement? (Anne Cottingham)

[113] Whose side would mother be on? Will she ever hear the real story? Too bad it has to be about taking sides instead of working together. I wonder if the same thing would happen "today" in the education system. (Mary Parker)

[114] Teaching is human interaction and because of the diversity of humans this interaction is based on disagreement as much as agreement (if not more); either way, communication is the foundation of any relationship. It is important to establish a parent-teacher relationship at the beginning of the year: like, making phone calls home to introduce yourself and your teaching style/ expectations. An effective parent-teacher relationship is essential in educating children. There may be conflicts in ideology but the bottom line for both involved is what is best for the child. If a teacher and parents continually disagree,

the child stuck in the middle will lose. Dialogue between the two will open new doors of progress, working together instead of against. This story also relates to the necessity of teachers acting in an immediate and persistent fashion. They need to act immediately not rashly but consistently. The teacher could have made a phone call to Aunt Maria to discuss the student and the homework situation. The teacher should have continued to enforce the consequence. The better you know yourself (essential) and your students, the more appropriate and fair your "punishment" will be. Explain why. There was a consistent lack of communication between all parties involved with the student. Dialogue and explanation may have taken this student elsewhere for the better. (Andrew Jackson)

[115] Very untrue statement! Teaching can be rewarding, frustrating, enlightening, and "fun." (Jane Ayers)

[116] This story at first rang true – until the aunt started slapping. The story confirmed my ideas that if you make unrealistic demands, students will challenge them by not doing it. I had a teacher in New York like this and I came in half way through the year from Canada. He wanted me to catch up on all the work I missed from September. Wow! Welcome to our school. I hated history it was all how great the Americans were. I knew I would be going back to Canada in four to five months. I did do the work and entered an essay contest "Why I was glad to be a Canadian." The contest was supposed to say American. I won. It felt good. But, of course, in the newspaper they wrote, "Why I was glad to be an American." (Heather Kowalchuk)

[117] I couldn't believe the array of emotions I felt as I read this story. I have never experienced what this boy must have gone through, but I can easily see how it could have happened. My parents often talk about their schooling experiences from the generation

before and it seems that academics was all that was important. Schooling did not seem to recognize that the emotional well being of the child was just as important as learning the "facts." I keep wondering where Frau Schmidt's compassion was. I admired Aunt Maria because I felt that she understood this little boy a lot more than anyone else in the story. I was also shocked by Aunt Alexandra. Did she not realize how difficult it must have been for the boy to have to leave home for a while? Wasn't there a better way to handle the situation? I really wanted to cheer the drunk member of the bowling team that stood up to the aunt. Too bad he had to go to jail! I notice how in the story the boy refers to the man as his "savoir." Even though each of the characters in the story responded so differently I seem to feel that each one of them thought that they were doing what was best for the boy.

I have always believed that school is not just about academics. There is much more to school than that. I believe that all children have the right to leave school with not only a good education in regards to academics, but also knowing and feeling that they mattered and that they were listened to and valued as human beings. I cannot help but think that the boy in the story was left with a very negative experience of that period of his life. Too bad!

I think that this story is a great way of promoting meaningful professional dialogue among teachers. It certainly got me thinking once again that as teachers we do not know what baggage our students come to school with and that we need to take the time to build a community and make them feel good about being in school and that they matter. Academics will naturally follow. (Mary Parker)

[118] Nice punch line. This story stresses to me the importance of winning over a student. No one will learn just to satisfy the wants of the "enemy." To be sure, young Matt was a defiant little scarab, but no one tried to get to the heart of his conscience. (Mike Smythe)

[119] Clearly, Aunt Alexandra should leave the teaching to those who are trained in pedagogy. She was not teaching at all. Did the student know the required responses? If a student does not know the correct response, how can they be expect to give it. "Like putting me in the cockpit of the space shuttle, each time I made a mistake I would receive a shock. You could shock me all you want, I still cannot fly an aircraft." Are you sure, you want me to continue, Matt? (Ron Kofman)

[120] As a counsellor, this story has a number of themes that I find quite interesting. There appears to be no consideration given to the fact that this young boy is probably very concerned about the "family emergency" and probably feels quite abandoned by his family. Change is difficult under any circumstances but particularly in these circumstances.

The teacher's techniques for gaining students compliance really struck a cord with me – she reminds me of a few of my math teachers – both of whom used public humiliation and intimidation to get compliance and, I suppose "results." Of course, the problem with this approach is that if it doesn't work there is often no other course of action available – you've lost the students forever. Teachers (adults) who operate this way often treat all people this way and I suspect the aunt was humiliated and intimidated as well.

The concept of punishment as a motivator is interesting. We, as educators, often resort to this even though we know it is not sound practise, but sometimes out of frustration and

expediency we use this. This is an interesting story that would be a good discussion for teachers. (Jennifer Eisner)

[121] This story seems to be a big put-on from beginning to end. It's the kind of story you see in comic books or in joke books. There was nothing in this story that engaged me. It held no interest for me except to make me laugh. I could not relate this story to any personal life experience. The story was a little extreme. I never met a teacher who would have done this. I had to learn my times tables but wasn't really forced to do it. Perhaps this story could show the evolution of teaching over the last few decades. (Annick Bordeau)

[122] Aunt Alexandra operates from a theory of knowledge which says that learning is deliberate and purposeful. She assumes that a child will learn more quickly to avoid a painful consequence much like a rat will alter its behaviour in order to avoid an electric shock. I don't believe that fear heightens motivation to learn because I don't believe it is really about motivation. I believe learning is a natural, life-long process. Human beings are learning all the time and it is relatively easy for us. The lack of motivation is a symptom that something is wrong for the learner but too often we, educators, see this lack of motivation as the problem itself. When I think back on my own experience as a learner, situations which cause me any amount of anxiety such as fear of failure or looking stupid in front of my peers, caused me to shut down even more so that I was unable to concentrate. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[123] I would feel uncomfortable using this piece for professional dialogue. This reminds me of the psych studies of the early sixties in which university students "zapped" (or so they thought) subjects in another room. The so-called subjects were actually actors and

the true subjects were actually the university students. The amazing part of the study was that these students kept increasing the 'voltage' to zap their 'subjects', even though they were upset about doing this. The students showed increased heart rates, higher adrenaline levels, raised blood pressure and increased perspiration. Even though the students thought this was a terrible thing to do, they continued to do so. The parallel for me as a teacher is that I know that there were times when I created an ever increasing hierarchy of consequences for the uncooperative student when what I really wanted was for us to work together. (Orysia Hull)

[124] As a teacher, I have many memories of black eyes – you just can't see the bruises. This is a story I would like to share with my staff. It is written in a way that is easy to read and believe. It's as if you and I are having a conversation. Was this your incentive to become a teacher? Although our goals may be the same, teaching styles vary drastically cross culturally as well as within our own school buildings. (Samantha Phillips)

[125] The above narrative offers a rich cocktail of situations and characters that can help generate a discussion on a wide array of social and educational issues: such as a historical perspective, reward vs. punishment, meaningful and commensurate consequences, comedy of extremes (Alexandra versus Maria) etc. The story has certainly elicited reflections on my past experiences and would, most likely do so for others. This could be a valuable catalyst for a meaningful exchange of ideas in its chosen setting. (Gianfranco Riva)

In my reading of the footnotes, I tried to keep the following in mind. The participants' written responses constitute a series of dialogues with the narrative and the characters constructed within it. Each footnote represents a significant moment in the dialogic interaction between reader and text. The footnotes reflect each reader's wandering viewpoint and her ongoing readjustments in the projections cast into the blanks of the text. I saw different types of reading responses. I named these types: **distancing oneself from the story, autobiographical response, empathic response,** and **normative response**. I will always refer to a specific footnote by placing its number in parentheses.

Distancing oneself from a critical incident narrative means rejecting the story as untrue. In most cases, the dialogue with the text would end at this point because the story raises a subject which the reader does not want to think about or because the story fails to offer a common point of reference. Annick writes,

> This story seems to be a big put-on from beginning to end. It's the kind of story you see in comic books or in joke books. There was nothing in this story that engaged me. It held no interest for me except to make me laugh. I could not relate this story to any personal life experience. The story was a little extreme. I never met a teacher who would have done this. I had to learn my times tables but wasn't really forced to do it. Perhaps this story could show the evolution of teaching over the last few decades (121).

I assume that readers may attribute verisimilitude to a story by referring to events in their own life story and comparing them to the characters' experiences. Annick suggests that she can find no points of reference in her own life story to make sense of the narrative. However, I believe that she does not read this story as a teacher. She construes the story

very narrowly as a personal memoir saying she was not forced to learn her times tables as a child. Annick's response shows that I, the author, have no control over the meaning potential of my story.

In the introduction to this chapter, I interpret the story in the context of my ongoing pedagogical concerns with protecting the pluralistic quality of classroom life. However, the narrator of the story merely recounts who does what to whom and withholds this context from the reader. I suspect making this context explicit may have invited Annick to relate the narrative to her own teaching experience.

In their **autobiographical responses**, Jane and Heather contextualize the narrative within their own lives. Diverse experiences make for different viewpoints and these will shift as the reader journeys through the text. Jane is reminded of having to move from school to school as a child (1). Then she brings her understanding of good pedagogy to the reading of the narrative. In her second response, her focus already shifts to Frau Schmidt's pedagogical decision to assign large amounts of math homework and to insist on the memorization of the times table. Jane contradicts her saying that memorization "...does not demonstrate true understanding" (15). However, Jane will not support Aunt Maria's disrespectful stance of writing Frau Schmidt off as stupid. She reads against this reaction suggesting Maria "...could have handled it differently" and that she needed to understand Frau Schmidt's goals (43). Later, Jane sees Aunt Alexandra as supporting the teacher's efforts qualifying her statement with the observation that "learning became a punishment and a negative experience" with unknown consequences for the child (69). Jane cheers

the fellow passenger's violent intervention, "I remember thinking hurrah! No more abuse." Then, she adds "But do two wrongs make a right? This was very unpleasant and uncomfortable for me as well as for the student!" (101). At first, I found this statement puzzling but then it alerted me to Jane's way of reading the story. She values dialogue that helps human agents negotiate their differences. The consistency with which the adult characters violated this value offended her. The implicit normative claim of Jane's reading-response is that teaching demands paying attention to a dialogic principle: we work out our differences and our common purposes in the process of speaking respectfully with each other. In her final comment she describes Aunt Alexandra's closing remarks, "This is what happens when you try to teach other people's children," as very untrue suggesting that "Teaching can be rewarding, frustrating, enlightening and fun"(115). Both statements rest on mutually exclusive understandings of teaching: on the one hand, teaching as a coercive act towards predetermined learning outcomes that authorize violent tactics; on the other hand, teaching as an activity that occurs within dialogic human relationships. However, for Jane the story does not appear to lend itself to a discussion of what these relationships might look like. Nor does Jane write about the potential usefulness of this story in promoting professional dialogue among teachers. In my view, Jane's response reflects an overriding concern for the principle of respect in the conversations among adults and children. Her response shows how our fundamental educational values may find expression in our reading response to narrative.

At first, Heather's reading-response resembles Jane's. Heather is reminded of the months she spent "in a grade four temporary classroom in New York" (7). Then her response

diverges from Jane's reading in important ways. One difference is that Heather's reading-response includes a narrative in which she recounts a similar experience. Like the narrator, Heather had to deal with the unreasonable demands of a teacher in a temporary classroom. However, unlike the narrator, she complied. Heather imports this negative experience into her reading of the text. The narrator remains silent when he is punished and Heather decides to speak for the child in her text. On several occasions (16, 22, 32, 38, 95) she emphatically inserts her own voice into the narrative, first in response to Frau Schmidt's punitive gesture, "Yeah! Right! That is 75 questions I'll never do!" (22) and later in response to the violent passenger, "Thank you, sir!" (95). Nonetheless, in her final comment Heather distances herself from my narrative telling us that the "...story at first rang true – until the aunt started slapping" (116). In response to this absence or lack of verisimilitude, Heather offers us a contrasting narrative that is more truthful to her experience,

> I had a teacher in New York like this and I came in half way through the year from Canada. He wanted me to catch up on all the work I missed from September. Wow! Welcome to our school. I hated history it was all how great the Americans were. I knew I would be going back to Canada in four to five months. I did do the work and entered an essay contest "Why I was glad to be a Canadian." The contest was supposed to say American. I won. It felt good. But, of course, in the newspaper they wrote, "Why I was glad to be an American (116).

In response to my story, Heather writes a powerful narrative. She shows us how reading a narrative can immediately elicit another narrative in the mind of the reader. In this response-narrative, Heather interprets my story in writing about the negation of her perspective and personal experience at school. She interweaves her narrative with mine.

The footnotes also include numerous examples of **empathic responses.** In footnotes 3, 11, 19, 23, 33, 39, 48, 73, 82, and 117, readers recapitulate their understanding of the narrator's experience. They do not explicitly relate any stories of their own life experience but instead read and write within the given narrative. An empathic reader attributes verisimilitude to the narrative and textually constructs herself as an observer-participant within the plot adding explanatory remarks without suggesting an alternate course of events. Mary reads the narrator's experience, attempting to place herself in his shoes already in her first response (3). She establishes a causal relationship between the family emergency and his lack of interest in schoolwork even though the narrator does not explicitly make this connection (11). She attributes courage to the narrator's act of defiance, not being sure whether she could have said "forget it to the homework" (19). To me this suggests the reader in the act of working out a relationship with the narrator, negotiating similarities and differences in personality to determine in what ways she can identify herself with him. I believe, Mary sides with the narrator, attempting to make his viewpoint her own. Statements such as "What an aunt! I like her" (33), "Who's going to win?" (39) can reasonably be attributed to the narrator (see also 48, 73, 82).

In her final comment, Mary offers her empathic reading of the narrative as a preamble to the claim that "...all children have the right to leave school with not only a good education in regards to academics, but also knowing and feeling that they mattered and that they were listened to and valued as human beings." To her, the value of the story is in reminding us that "...as teachers we do not know what baggage our students come to school with and that we need to take the time to build a community and make them feel

good about being in school and that they matter. Academics will naturally follow." (117). This reading loudly resonates with my interest in the relationship between plurality, conversation, and educational purposes at school – even though I believe that a pluralistic and respectful classroom community is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the possibility of academic learning.

Several teachers read the narrative to make **normative** claims about good teaching practices and parental responsibilities. Ron inserted his responses at strategic moments reminding us, for example, that the teacher should have been made aware of the kind of emergency to work more effectively with the student (4); and that the teacher may need to assign less homework and use a different approach with the boy (12, 25). Mike sees the story as an illustration of the principle that teachers need to win over their students instead of demanding compliance (55, 118). Ron, Gianfranco, and Andrew also emphasize that teachers and parents need to speak with each other to work out common purposes (47, 50, 52, 114). These readings suggest that the story is a cautionary tale that directs our attention to principles of good classroom practice.

These different reading-responses raise the following question in my mind: How could this story become the basis of a collective inquiry? As a research collective, we would need to come to terms with the plurality of our responses to the narrative. The divergent responses allow us to explore other views of the narrative and to foreground other ways of reading it. As a community of readers, we might recognize that the text becomes unstable, as it is resituated and redescribed by the participants in the conversation.

Annick believes my narrative belongs in a joke book (121). Orysia questions the presence of stereotypes in the piece. She asks, "Is it necessary?" (89) Ron interjects, "You can't be serious... I know this does happen, but I like to believe only on TV" (83). My intention was to narrate how coercive speech situations undermine educational purposes. I expected the readers to relate this issue to the context of their own school experience and teaching practice. Most of the readers did this in their own personal way. Their responses would be powerful conversation starters allowing teachers to name issues of concern to their practice. Orysia says, "...I know that there were times when I created an ever increasing hierarchy of consequences for the uncooperative student when what I really wanted was for us to work together" (123). Samantha points to the teacher as a victim in this situation, "As a teacher, I have many memories of black eyes – you just can't see the bruises. This is a story I would like to share with my staff. It is written in a way that is easy to read and believe" (122). Clearly, the text raised a multiplicity of issues, as Gianfranco suggests,

> The above narrative offers a rich cocktail of situation and characters that can generate a discussion on a wide array of social and educational issues: such as a historical perspective, reward vs. punishment, meaningful and commensurate consequences, comedy of extremes (Alexandra vs. Maria) etc. (125).

The critical incident narrative becomes a handmaiden for a conversation in which teachers may narrativize and interpret their own practices. At the point of having achieved this effect, my story can quietly fade into the background and make room for the readers and their stories.

Reading these responses, I realize that the shortcoming of my first narrative may be its **undeclared or understated purpose**. My undeclared purpose in writing the first version of this narrative was to think about the totalizing school culture I experienced as a novice teacher and its effects on children who ask to be treated individual human beings. My childhood experience, as I remembered it in the story, helped me understand the humiliated and abused teenager storming out of her classroom. It also helped me remember that dialogue, divergent viewpoints, and morally grounded justification for teaching practice define my narrative inquiry and action research.

The human condition of plurality means that an educational practice will necessarily be construed differently by the individual members of a class or of an action research collective. Inevitably, these differences call for an ongoing dialogue in which the participants may speak "out of a distinct perspective and yet open to those around" (Greene, p. 156). My narrative tried to prepare the ground for a conversation about the necessity of such dialogue among the participants in any learning community of children or adults.

Chapter four:

The pragmatic failure of technical and prescriptive discourse

Dewey (1929) argues that an educational science makes for diversity in educational practice and that "educational practices furnish the material that sets the problems of such a science" (p. 35). In this way, he draws my attention to the mutual entailment of theory which offers tools for educational inquiry and pedagogic action which is contextualized within and informed by the inquiry. Prescribed action occurs outside the context of theorized inquiry.

Prescriptive conversations outline a course of action to be enacted instrumentally with the intention of achieving a preconceived outcome. Arendt (1983) warns that the "ends-means category ...always proves to be ruinous when applied to acting" (p. 147). By definition, human action always occurs in the presence of others and their "intersecting and interfering intentions." Therefore, we act in a world in which "...no end and no intention has ever been achieved as it was originally intended" (p.147-8). The circumscribed world of the classroom can sometimes and usually only for short periods be arranged to isolate all the active ego-subjects sufficiently from one another "so that there will be no mutual interference of their ends and aims" (p. 147). I believe that this isolation of human beings from each other is the precondition for the success of instrumental action. In educational discourse, we can speak of the pragmatic failure of instrumental action because it is predicated on the presumed incapacity of teachers and

students to engage in critical reflection and in the pluralistic dialogue Greene (1995) discussed in the previous chapter.

What sets human agents apart from mere objects is their capacity to form intentions and to express these in speech and action. Rorty suggested that our language games, our vocabularies and our ways of speaking furnish us truth-value candidates – therefore, the apparently innocent question: Why do you talk that way? The language games structuring and guiding our educational discourse make some normative claims possible and exclude others. We cannot conceive of something being possibly true nor conceive a course of action, if we do not have the language to explore and describe it.

Our stories are autobiographical in the sense that in the acts of writing and reading we situate ourselves as contingent human agents in the teaching profession. Therefore, our action research narrative requires a public of teachers who will read and discuss it critically with each other. This reading requires shared pre-understandings of the problematic issues facing the teaching profession. We have seen in the multiple readings of the preceding narrative that each reader projects her own experiences onto the text. The reader also encounters numerous details within the narrative which make absolutely no difference to the critical questions. It is, for example, not important whether the narrator was slapped on a bus or a train or whether the train stopped in Cologne or in Timbuktu. The reader's participation in an ongoing professional conversation makes for an ability to draw on shared pre-understandings, to focus on critical elements in the plot and to identify problematic issues for discussion. Each identified problem invites the

questions: can we live with this state of affairs and how could things be different? In this way, the narrative may help us imagine a different future. However, the norms of the discourse community in which we participate always already furnish images of a good future.

At the same time, the conversation of teachers may be constrained by an institutional discourse in which moral considerations are effectively excluded or reduced to the goal of controlling children. If moral considerations of educational practice are not sufficiently questioned, discussed, and researched, the professional conversation may define teaching as a studied manipulation of individual children. Teachers adopt and perfect techniques of control and correction which situate the child as an individual subject to appropriate habits, institutional rules, given instructions, and to "...an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him" (Foucault, 1995, p. 128-9). This systematic negation of plurality is the expression of a technical and prescriptive discourse within the institution.

As action researchers, we appeal to a discourse ethic which allows all the participants in the conversation – even the children – to ask questions like: Why are we doing this? What purposes does this course of action serve? How does it benefit me? In prescriptive discourse, such questions are effectively excluded from the conversation and the normative power of the factual (the present state of affairs) remains intact. The first step towards understanding such a situation might be narrativizing it.

The narrative of chapter four examines the pragmatic failure of technical and prescriptive conversation as the dominant form of discourse among teachers. I wish to foreground the ways in which the readers interweave their own narratives of experience with the text to explore how they were socialized into the professional conversation and its dominant forms of discourse.

Narrative: Control games

As a first year teacher, I worked in a school that was plagued by occasional, but very dramatic acts of vandalism. The perpetrators belonged to a group of grade-nine students who had acquired the reputation of being insubordinate and irreverent "trouble-makers." They stood out because the large majority of the student population was remarkably compliant.[126] The teachers and the administration prided themselves on a very orderly and quiet school. In most classrooms desks and chairs stood in rows and children spent most of their time silently "doing seat-work" which meant filling out worksheets, copying notes from the blackboard or watching the teacher deliver a lesson.[127], [128], [129], [130], [131], [132], [133]

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[126] This is a very common setting. Most children are compliant and a few truly rebellious. (Gianfranco Riva)

[127] Compliance and order. I think about this as I am currently supervising a student teacher and she is *so* concerned that her faculty supervisor will come in and the class will not be "perfect." And she's watched my more or less constructed – well "mayhem" isn't the word, but it's often not really quiet – classroom and she's trying to figure out the balance. (Marlene Milne)

The grade-nine students whom I taught Basic French also presented me with four very unruly students. Unsure of how to handle the situation, I decided to seek advice from Mr. Brown, my principal.[134] "This really concerns me," he responded. A few hours later, he entered my classroom to observe my work with this group. He carried a three-ring binder. The words "Teacher Evaluation" were legibly printed on its spine. He spoke in a voice clearly audible to all, "Please continue your lesson. I'll just sit in the back row and see what's going on."[135], [136] The four turned out to be unusually compliant during the entire

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[128] Boring! (Jane Ayers)

[129] This story allows for professional dialogue among staffs. It reminds me of my experiences at a junior high school where I taught. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[130] Sounds like when I went to school. (Mary Parker)

[131] Classroom environment seems a bit dated – like mine! (Ron Kofman)

[132] Issues: vandalism, sign of isolation in community; obedience, compliance, busy work vs. engagement. Negative behaviour is usually a cry for validation – sending a message to adults, "I don't belong and I need help." (Orysia Hull)

[133] Teacher-directed instruction. Traditional. Minimizes disruption yes, but also the children's involvement. (Gianfranco Riva)

[134] Why principal? Why not other teachers who may have dealt with the students previously? (Andrew Jackson)

[135] Asking questions = lack of competence? Evaluation needs to be separate issue. Dialogue before and after evaluation? (Orysia Hull)

[136] Pressure! (Samantha Phillips)

forty-minute period. After the children had left he approached me, "That was quite good. I do not see a problem here. I will have the secretary type up my report to the superintendent. Your copy will be in the mailbox next week.[137] And one bit of advice. If you are having trouble with this bunch, do not talk about it too much with the staff. They will think you do not know what you are doing. In the future, just remember to take the bull by the horns yourself."[138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147]

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[137] This is exactly how teacher evaluation was done in my early years of teaching. Sometimes we didn't even get to see or read the evaluation, never mind signing it. In my case, when I inquired I was told, "You don't need to worry. Yours is really good." In that same year, a teacher down the hall was "released from contract." Eventually several years later, she was given a compensation package for never having seen or signed her evaluation. (Orysia Hull)

[138] Odd, how the kids know – and come on your side when the "authority" steps in. Administrators often are out of touch with reality, often unaware of curriculum objectives – much more concerned with a sort of 40's quiet in rows thing. Teacher evaluation here, at least, is predicated on above. (Marlene Milne)

[139] Presence of principal creates artificial environment and discourages dialogue. (Andrew Jackson)

[140] This was not the problem: the teacher did not need evaluating but support and suggestions. Whatever happened to the concept of teaming and peer support? Hiding things doesn't help. (Jane Ayers)

[141] Keep your mouth shut. Look like you can handle it. Don't share ideas with staff or work together. "Handle it on your own." (Heather Kowalchuk)

He and I did not speak of this class again. I concluded that coming to an understanding[148] with these children would be entirely up to me and that my ability to do so would reflect on my professional competence.[149], [150], [151], [152]

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[142] This doesn't surprise me for some reason. Once again, this story seems to be about blaming instead of trying to find a solution to the problem. Too bad there's no support. (Mary Parker)

[143] Interesting how the principal can impart the school's culture so succinctly. (Mike Smythe)

[144] Two issues concern me here. First, I ask for help from the principal, and he turns around and makes the issue an evaluation process. Second, keep this to myself, I'm not sure I would agree with this philosophy. (Ron Kofman)

[145] Reminds me of how isolating teaching can be – that we sometimes don't talk to each other as teachers because we don't want to share our uncertainties, misgivings, and struggles. The system often perpetuates this. When power is at the top of the chain of command, it is perceived that one need protect oneself from criticism. In a more collaborative democratic model problem solving requires everyone's input and therefore everyone's experience and expertise. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[146] Can this be true? Talking out your problems, I find, is one of the most gratifying ways to solving them – with people who understand. (Samantha Phillips)

[147] Mr. Brown believes that classroom problems stem only from the teacher's ability to run a class!! (Gianfranco Riva)

[148] As always: understand yourself, understand other. (Andrew Jackson)

However, during the November staff meeting, teachers put the issue of "grade-nine misbehavior" on the agenda.[153], [154], [155] In the conversation that followed a consensus quickly emerged: drastic action was required or else children in the younger grades would also "go out of control."[156], [157], [158], [159]

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[149] Interesting association. You are give a total X quantity in student potential and past and behaviour patterns and then you feel you "fail" if it doesn't fall out right. Doesn't anyone realize the colossal spectrum one faces?? (Marlene Milne)

[150] Does it reflect on our competence? I don't think so. But we do need knowledge and understanding of "problem" kids. (Jane Ayers)

[151] Professional: the ability to manage a class – rather narrow n'est-ce pas. (Mike Smythe)

[152] I think the teacher (unfortunately) read his situation accurately. I sure would like to know what the other staff thought of this situation. Did the principal also tell them to keep it to themselves? (Ron Kofman)

[153] My questions have been answered. (Ron Kofman)

[154] The lid must blow. (Samantha Phillips)

[155] A problem student is generally not the problem of a specific teacher. Need for out of class support. (Gianfranco Riva)

[156] This targets another issue. Communication between colleagues is largely Band-Aid paperwork. One administrator I had addressed this quite well. He gave us an afternoon and big pieces of paper to put the names of problem (academic, behavioral, personal)

Mr. Brown acknowledged the concerns of the teachers and suggested a get-tough policy[160] known as assertive discipline. "I own a video which explains the technique very well," he explained. "We could watch it during our next professional development day and plan the implementation."[161], [162], [163], [164], [165], [166]

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students on and student services were there and wow – what surfaced! And what coherent action plans! (Marlene Milne)

[157] YES! And they are the role models. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[158] Must have been comforting for the teacher to realize that he was not alone in having difficulty with these students. (Mary Parker)

[159] Validation of concern but present a whole new set of concerns when other teachers have complaints about your students. Is safety of others a concern? (Orysia Hull)

[160] Today's "zero-tolerance" paradox: fight violence with violence; school – prison; fear and anger prevail over learning; emphasis on punishment over corrective assistance. (Andrew Jackson)

[161] Yeah! That will do it. Give me a break. I think working as a team is what's important here. (Mary Parker)

[162] When is the next professional development day? The impression I had from the earlier text, this was a very serious issue. I'm not sure Mr. Brown is proceeding in the right direction. (Ron Kofman)

[163] Assertive discipline is about compliance of students and controlling behaviour externally. If all behaviour is need fulfilling what happens if getting more check marks and sitting in the office is desirable to remaining in class? (Elizabeth Fromm)

The vice-principal, Mr. Darling, immediately responded, "Yes, that would be something really practical and it would give us the tools we need to deal with this problem effectively."[167], [168]

I anticipated this professional development session with eagerness. As a novice, I realized that my teaching techniques needed refinement.[169] The imminent inservice on "assertive

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[164] Compliance rather than engagement; instant and easy "diagnosis" and "prescription"; fallacy in thinking – practical = easy implementation (concept is simple but implementation is complex); reminds me of Carl Braun's words "There is nothing more practical than a good theory" What's the theory or belief system that is the foundation of Assertive Discipline? Does that fit with what we know about learning? (Orysia Hull)

[165] Putting it off, with a video no less, is not the answer. Basic problem solving techniques is. (Samantha Phillips)

[166] Policy of non-intervention by the administration is in operation here. (Gianfranco Riva)

[167] Predictable. Turn to "text" not people. Yes, dealing with the misbehaviour on a large scale is a collective teacher/admin problem, but it is not solved by a frigging video. It is solved by talking together! (Marlene Milne)

[168] Mr. Darling... sounds like a "yes man" to me. I can't stand vice principals like this... or any kind of people with this attitude. (Ron Kofman)

[169] Openness to new ideas and learning as new teacher (good); always growing. (Andrew Jackson)

discipline" promised to offer some useful strategies. They turned out to be amazingly simple. The video modeled them for us. It showed a teacher in the middle of teaching a lesson on split infinitives when Henry, an adolescent student in the front row, threw an airplane. The teacher calmly continued with his speech as he wrote Henry's name on the board. When the student rudely asked, "Man, what was that for?"[170] the teacher scratched a check mark next to Henry's name.[171] When the boy protested, "That's so unfair!" a second check mark appeared and the non-compliant student was sent to the office. [172], [173], [174], [175], [176], [177], [178], [179]

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[170] Explain policies before implementing them; include students in decision-making. (Andrew Jackson)

[171] Punishment or consequence? (Ron Kofman)

[172] Well, maybe that might work if everyone did it to Henry, and everyone agreed about consequences. Maybe. It is non confrontational, and gets Henry (et al) intrigued. (Marlene Milne)

[173] Done this fifteen years ago. And then started to erase check marks when behaving (Heather Kowalchuk)

[174] Will it work? Doesn't sound like real life to me. (Mary Parker)

[175] Can I try that! – What is this, the 1940's? (Mike Smythe)

[176] Sounds familiar, I tried this crazy checkmark-discipline method in grade four. I hated it and so did most of the kids (especially the ones who would always get check marks). (Heather Kowalchuk)

[177] Same as last story: increasing the "zap" level. (Orysia Hull)

As Mr. Brown turned the monitor off, Miss Darnel, the business-education teacher, spoke

up, "This is a great strategy. But we will have to play as a team and speak with one voice.

Otherwise the kids are not going to get the message."[180], [181], [182], [183], [184], [185]

At the end of the meeting Paul Gregson who taught in the classroom next to mine voiced

a concern, "I have a problem with this idea. Won't I look silly prancing up to the

blackboard to write names every time a kid misbehaves? And what's the connection

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[178] I don't ship my problems to the office! I deal with them myself so I have the power –

not the principal. I'm the one who has to deal with the kid each day! (Samantha Phillips)

[179] A very simplistic approach to discipline. (Gianfranco Riva)

[180] What happens next? Oh – mostly what I thought. (Marlene Milne)

[181] Good: teacher team through dialogue and communication – earlier discouraged.

(Andrew Jackson)

[182] Teamwork. (Mary Parker)

[183] I remember one teacher going "nuts" on gum chewing. Hours were spent discussing a

strategy to eliminate school gum chewing. What a waste of time! My rule in the class is if

I see you chewing, it's out – I never had a problem with this. I'm not so sure this is a

good strategy. Though a school may have some common rules, each classroom is unique.

I'm not sure, all the staff doing all the same thing is so effective. (Ron Kofman)

[184] What if I can't buy into this approach? But a common culture of respect and self-

discipline is important. (Orysia Hull)

[185] Consistent discipline policy throughout the school is needed. (Gianfranco Riva)

between for example Language Arts and getting sent to the office for having your name on the board?"[186], [187], [188], [189], [190], [191], [192], [193]

I pictured the grade-nine students I saw in my Basic French class for forty minutes every day. They were a noisy group. However, most of the time they willingly participated in

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[186] Well, the teachers are voicing real concerns – sounds great, looks great but … (Marlene Milne)

[187] Can be verbal warnings – adaptability. (Andrew Jackson)

[188] This doesn't seem like a way to treat grade nine students. What about ownership and responsibility for self and actions? What about involving the students in the rules and parameters for behaviours. Dictatorships are not successful. Understanding the teenage psyche would help a lot more! (Jane Ayers)

[189] How did the administrator respond to this question? (Mary Parker)

[190] I too have a problem with this idea. It has been my experience that K to 8 send students to the office more than 9 to 12. At the senior level, teachers and students can usually sort things out. (Ron Kofman)

[191] Good question! This creates more distance in the relationship between teacher and student. (Orysia Hull)

[192] This raises the question of appropriate consequences. (Samantha Phillips)

[193] Behaviour is connected to learning. What is the real source of bad behaviour? Is it due to lack of relevance or to outside factors? Each case must be analyzed by itself. When a critical mass of misbehaving students is reached, how can one teach? Meaningful focus on engaging activities is the key to overall good behaviour. (Gianfranco Riva)

fast-paced oral language games, and in staging humourous dialogues in French." I wondered whether "assertive discipline" would improve the classroom dynamics in any way.[194], [195], [196]

I wondered about Paul Gregson's questions. In my mind, they seemed merely rhetorical.[197] A good dose of discipline might do these grade-nine students some good. After all, they only engaged with my lessons on their terms.[198], [199] Each lesson had to be fun! If I were firmer in the classroom, I might be able to teach them the irregular verbs that I had wanted to touch on.[200], [201], [202]

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[194] I did grade eight Basic French forty minutes a day, too. They also loved games. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[195] I would agree that assertive discipline can work. But I also think that the teacher should see what works for him and try to incorporate those methods into his teaching program. (Ron Kofman)

[196] Good reflection. (Orysia Hull)

[197] For heaven's sake Matt, here you go again using these words I don't understand. Don't you have a life!! (Ron Kofman)

[198] Bingo! (Mike Smythe)

[199] Building trust over time. (Orysia Hull)

[200] I long ago realized that teaching has more in common with performance than curriculum. My passion can be catching. I am in competition for their attention. Yes. Set up structure, make rules clear. Use logical consequences. Then play a bit. (Marlene Milne)

Paul Gregson only received blank stares in reply to his questions. Everyone else agreed to use "assertive discipline" in the classroom and Mr. Brown promised total support by dealing "very decisively"[203] with students sent to the office for their misbehavior.[204], [205], [206], [207], [208]

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[201] Excellent: variety of instructional techniques, i.e. student-centered games; discipline should be balanced with careful and intuitive planning. Why can't you make the irregular verbs fun? (Andrew Jackson)

[202] Principals have more to deal with than problem behavior. For me, when I send a student to the principal, I am near the end of my rope. (Ron Kofman)

[203] I wonder what this might be. (Marlene Milne)

[204] Teachers must be able to adapt policies to classroom diversity and remain flexible within protocol boundaries. (Andrew Jackson)

[205] I can't see this working. I also don't believe the principal would deal with things appropriately at his level. (Mary Parker)

[206] Mr. Brown for president! It's easy to give your power to the principal. Stupid too. (Mike Smythe)

[207] Sounds like my son's school. All rules, low tolerance for individual differences. (Jennifer Harcourt)

[208] The principal and the teachers must work together to decide how the office can be supportive. (Samantha Phillips)

On our way to the parking lot Mr. Darling reminded me I had to be much more attentive to classroom discipline particularly in light of the new school policy and get ready to take the bull by the horns. "Remember this is our show," he added. "Mr. Brown and I are responsible for the school. If we do assertive discipline, everyone has to be on board. The alternative is losing control. Because there is going to be some trouble before they get used to the new routine."[209], [210], [211], [212], [213], [214], [215], [216]

The following day at 9:40, the grade-nine students sauntered into the classroom. Marc approached me wearing his baseball cap, a breach of the "no-hats" school policy. "You know Miss Darnel sent Mike and Andrew to the office for refusing to take of their caps," he announced loudly.

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[209] I think I would nod and smile and continue trying to teach (Marlene Milne)

[210] You better buy in. (Heather Kowalchuk)

[211] I can just imagine how I would feel as the classroom teacher if someone said that to me. (Mary Parker)

[212] Mr. Brown took the same approach with the "cover-up." (Ron Kofman)

[213] I always get nervous about everyone "being on board" because it doesn't allow for philosophical diversity among teachers. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[214] Administrative pressure – works only if you agree with point of view. (Orysia Hull)

[215] This sounds more like a threat than a pep talk. (Samantha Phillips)

[216] I see a dislocated school structure here and no meaningful coordination between administration and teaching staff (Gianfranco Riva)

"Marc, you know very well that you're not supposed to be wearing a hat in school."[217], [218]

"No, you're doing it all wrong. Didn't you know you have to write my name on the board? I think it will take me about five seconds to get you to put three check marks next to my name and kick me out."[219],[220],[221],[222],[223],[224],[225]

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[217] Policy is policy. I enforce admin. policy. One of the clear "rules" (Marlene Milne)

[218] This story made me think of my experiences this year. I experienced similar emotions. I even did the same thing (putting names on the blackboard) but I found it works for me. I think this story could get teachers talking about their own experiences. (Annick Bordeau)

[219] Shows how smart and quick students can be. What's wrong with having fun while learning? (Jane Ayers)

[220] Didn't take long for the "testing" of the policy to begin. I can picture the scenario quite vividly in my mind. (Mary Parker)

[221] Who is in control? Marc is challenging the policy. The student is making a game of the whole thing. How the teacher reacts will be critical here. How the teacher reacts will depend on the relationship he has with the student. The impression I have is the teacher has a fair relationship so I'm not sure "playing the heavy" will work. If anything, it will hurt his relationship with the students. (Ron Kofman)

[222] Was it just this group or a failure everywhere? Most kids don't really want to get kicked out and be away from their friends. (Jennifer Harcourt)

[223] I've been thinking a lot about systems lately. The factory model of education sees knowledge as deposited into students via teacher experts each of whom deliver their small piece of the curriculum. There are lots of checks and balances in the system to

I asked Marc to leave the classroom and speak with the principal.[226], [227], [228], [229]

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make sure that the knowledge transference happens smoothly and uniformly. There are testing and reporting procedures and because time is always limited we have systems to deal with misbehaviour as well. The problem is that misbehaviour is seen as a glitch in the system which can be fixed by adding a new mechanism to compensate for the glitch. This works fine on paper but problems of misbehaviour are not problems with the system at all but rather with people who have a diversity of needs and agendas. Treating students as components of a system objectifies them removing their sense of power and self-determination. I have to wonder whether it doesn't make a school climate worse since students begin to fight the system (us [students] vs. them [teachers]) in order to preserve their own sense of power and control. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[224] Students' way of taking control of the new routine and it soon becomes the culture of the classroom. (Orysia Hull)

[225] Kids sure learn our game fast and they seem to know the rules better than we do. (Samantha Phillips)

[226] There are two different issues here. One is admin. policy, the other the much more subtle and complex one is class "discipline." Admin says no hats? Right, no hats. Admin says quiet/compliant? No – that may not be my style. (Marlene Milne)

[227] What happened as a result of going to the principal? What a great story! I'm laughing as I'm writing this, not out of disbelief but because I saw it coming.

I see this story as two different situations under the same umbrella of school discipline. Firstly, there is the situation of how adequately or inadequately the teacher is perceived

as dealing with discipline issues in the classroom. Secondly, there is the situation of how the decisions that a school makes in regards to a discipline policy affect the actual classroom and the student populations within it.

This story rings very true to life. In my teaching career of ten years, I have seen this situation happen quite a few times, where a teacher has a difficult class, and it is assumed that the teacher must be doing something wrong. Whenever I have seen this happen I have always thought to myself that I would really like to see the person who is criticizing or not supporting the classroom teacher in a constructive way, go into the classroom and show how they think it should be done. I bet that in time they experience some of the same situations as the teacher whom they considered "inadequate." I strongly believe that there is always room for improvement in teaching, but supporting and dialoguing with the teacher is the way to go about it – not making the teacher feel that they are a "loser" or inadequate as a teacher or have them worry that if they don't shape up their job is on the line (term teachers especially).

I also strongly believe that not only do students need to feel that they are a part of the community, but that teachers need to be able to feel that way as well. In the story when the principal came in to evaluate the teacher, the teacher probably didn't feel like what he had discussed with the principal earlier had truly been understood by the principal. Was the administrator really listening to what the teacher was saying? Was coming in and evaluating the teacher helping the situation which the teacher had discussed with the principal? Did the teacher feel that he/she could have this type of a dialogue with the principal in the future? Unfortunately, the answer is probably no to all the above questions. What a shame because real growth could have happened there.

Within three weeks, the assertive discipline campaign was quietly written off. No one ever spoke of it again – at least not within my earshot.[230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236]

I think that this story is a good way to promote meaningful professional dialogue among teachers. I believe that I would get teachers to think about now they manage their classrooms and the support of lack or support that they have had along their journey. (Mary Parker)

[228] This story was most interesting in that it seemed to highlight some of the typical problems that teachers face working in schools with other people – colleagues, students, admin. As teachers, we are critical of others rather than supportive, and often feel that if someone operates differently, then we do, then they are "not as good." For some teachers there is often the myth of if my class is quiet and controlled I am a good teacher. We also look for easy solutions to complex problems (the video) and require compliance on the part of all of our peers. We must all do exactly the same thing. This often results in huge power struggles for both students and staf((Jennifer Eisner)

[229] The school in question plays control games. It does not have anything that resembles a school policy on behaviour. The administrators show no leadership, no insight, and no understanding of what it means to create a healthy learning environment. This school is like a boat drifting in the open seas of education, a rudderless ship at the whims of the contradictory pressures characteristic of a "Day in the life of an average school." (Gianfranco Riva)

[230] It is clear that the principal and the vice-principal are managers, not to be confused with leaders and that clinical teacher evaluation is in vogue. When the teachers had a

problem, the principal and vice principal were their "Johnny on the spot" to solve it for them. The message they were giving the teachers was one of, "we can solve this problem for you! You and your students can depend on us to follow up." Certainly, a situation like this sets up a situation for learned helplessness. The teachers come to rely on the administrators for everything. The administrators own the problem and the solution.

Isn't mathematics and life all about learning to problem solve? If I have a problem with a student, it is my responsibility to try to solve the problem. Administrators who are leaders are there to support you in the process. If we want our students to solve problems cooperatively and collaboratively, should not the same hold true for us? School wide discipline policies have proven to be ineffective in the long term. There isn't a ONE SIZE FITS ALL curriculum. Certainly, this is a stifling situation for a first year teacher to be in... but to her credit, she was beginning to discover that fun engaged her students, not assertive discipline. (Anne Cottingham)

[231] For me, teaching wasn't as difficult as structuring continually fun and exciting lessons. That got easier as classroom interaction progressed. The "zero-tolerance" policy that most schools are implementing lately is one of the many options (and not the most effective); it is fighting violence with violence. What about communication and the building of a community (teacher – students – parents). Policies should not be implemented half way through the year because students will react. This again relates to the need for immediate and persistent action, both to deal with and prevent incidences. Policies must allow a certain degree of flexibility as well. A teacher-student dialogue is essential to a smoothly operated classroom; classroom democracy and dialogue. Where students participate or get involved they are more likely to care and try. Dialogue helps to

put student diversity in perspective. A teacher must interact with the students and involve them as much as possible in terms of classroom regulations, curriculum direction and so on; involve and include. A teacher who fears the students cannot understand them. In the end, self-reliance and self-awareness is key. Dialogue grows out of this. (Andrew Jackson)

[232] Predictable outcome! (Jane Ayers)

[233] Stupid is as stupid does. If the consequence is not logical, there is no discipline. Students will only engage on their own terms. (Mike Smythe)

[234] "Fade out" (Orysia Hull)

[235] The notion of respect for others is not part of the discussion. Furthermore, who is responsible for discipline? In this case, it's the teacher only. Teachers may be lured into believing that this is teaching students to be self-disciplined. However, the only one responsible for discipline in this scenario is the teacher. In the late 70's there was a commonly used theory of motivation (management) called KITA (kick in the ass). The problem was the only one who was actually motivated was the teacher. Self-discipline needs to be intrinsically motivating in order to take root. That is not the foundation on which assertive discipline is built. As a result, do teachers feel less empowered when this approach fails? (Orysia Hull)

[236] I'm glad to see the principal gave up on a useless exercise. That shows courage. Unless the teachers and principal work together, no discipline will be effective. The students quickly learn who they can push and how far. As a classroom teacher, I "push" back before it must leave the room. There are times when the teacher does not match the discipline policy of the principal. Then the teacher's classroom must be managed from

within. There are some principals that must win at "control games" regardless of the

pleadings of the teachers! (Samantha Phillips)

This story highlights the failure of a disciplinary strategy. The conversation of the teachers in the narrative is highly controlled, moral issues are effectively excluded, and divergent views are ignored. Among the staff, discourse establishes patterns of compliance and subordination. In the grade-nine classroom, students negotiate for a more egalitarian relationship. They stage brief but very dramatic spectacles of rebellion and insubordination to achieve this aim. But even in the act of revolt, the children are constrained by the totalizing culture of the school. They cannot act constructively. Instead, they are limited to contradicting and opposing the manipulative presence of the disciplinarian.

In the act of writing the story, I situated myself as a naïve first year teacher negotiating the value system of this school. I want my students to be more orderly and talk about this to the principal without the foreknowledge that this will raise the issue of my professional competence. I observe the situation as it evolves. During the confrontation with Marc, I refuse to comply with the disciplinarian ritual of putting check marks on the board. Unsure of how to come to a common understanding with the boy, I nonetheless send him to the office. In the eyes of the principal, this act will probably place me within the framework of acceptability.

Orysia's reference to Milgram's experiments on obedience to malevolent authority resonated for me (123). Perhaps, our critical incident narratives can help us "...critically re-examine the ethics and tactics of our revered social institutions, which lay the

foundation for our mindless obedience to rules, to expectations, and to people playing at being authorities" (Askenasy, 1978, p. 48).

The teachers' statements differed in important ways from the statements of the first study. Surprisingly, none of the research participants openly doubted the verisimilitude of the story or tried to relegate it to a joke book. Autobiographical and normative responses predominate. Numerous readers relate the narrative to their own experience of teaching and schooling. They also criticize the discourse patterns in the school and explicitly distance themselves from the actions planned by the school staff. A few readers even discussed the normative assumptions of the educational leaders in the school and their relationship to the teaching staff.

As I read the responses, I saw the following themes emerge:

1. Verisimilitude of the story:

The narrative resonated for the teachers. Heather tells us that the story reminds her of a particular junior high school: Heather even used this "crazy checkmark-discipline method" and discovered that she and the children hated it (129, 141, 173, 176). Annick, however, found the method useful, "This story made me think of my experiences this year. I experienced similar emotions. I even did the same thing (putting names on the blackboard) but I found it works for me. I think this story could get teachers talking about their own experiences (218). Mary is reminded of the days when she went to school (130). Jennifer says that it sounds like her son's school: "All rules, low tolerance for individual differences."

Orysia writes, "This is exactly how teacher evaluation was done in my early years of teaching" (137). Marlene identifies an approach to teacher evaluation in which the supervisor is unaware of curriculum objectives and only concerned with maintaining order (138).

2. Isolation of teachers in their classroom:

Within the text, teachers can read their own experiences of having to work out problems in isolation. Heather identifies the modus operandi: "Keep your mouth shut. Look like you can handle it. Don't share ideas with staff or work together." Jane asks, "Whatever happened to the concept of teaming and peer support? Hiding things doesn't help" (140). The story reminds Elizabeth "of how isolating teaching can be – that we sometimes don't talk to each other as teachers because we don't want to share our uncertainties, misgivings, and struggles. The system often perpetuates this. When power is at the top of the chain of command, it is perceived that one need protect oneself from criticism. In a more collaborative democratic model problem solving requires everyone's input and therefore everyone's experience and expertise" (145).

3. Disciplinarian conception of teaching:

Divergent views on assertive discipline emerged even though the consensus could be that it reflects a narrow understanding of teaching and that it minimizes learning for the sake of exercising control over children. A few teachers actually tried this "crazy checkmark

discipline method." Heather tells us she hated it (176). Ron believes that "...assertive discipline can work" and adds, "...the teacher should see what works for him and try to incorporate those methods into his teaching program" (195). Later, Ron suggests that assertive discipline might hurt the narrator's relationship with his students (221). Annick writes, "I even did the same thing (putting names on the blackboard) but I found it works for me" (218). Elizabeth describes how the teachers in the story view children as objectified components of a system (223).

4. Teaching as a technical act:

The intellectual horizon of the principal precludes any understanding of the possibility of self-critical inquiry or reflective dialogue among the staff about the conditions at their school. Brown and Darling are committed to a technical view of teaching — hence their enthusiasm for "assertive discipline." They believe that good teaching can be described as a distinct set of strategic behaviours applicable in different contexts. Andrew suggests that the "presence of the principal creates an artificial environment and discourages dialogue (139). I believe the principal might reply that there is nothing much to talk about aside from the proven strategies for effective classroom management and instruction. These strategies are already given. Instead of trying to re-invent the wheel, teachers should learn how to apply them. Two issues concern Ron, "First, I ask for help from the principal, and he turns around makes the issue an evaluation process. Second, keep this to myself. I am not sure I would agree with this philosophy" (144). At the time, I remember being offended when the principal showed up to evaluate my classroom management

skills in response to my request for help. However, in his view of teaching, my request already signaled incompetence.

5. Turning to text not people:

In prescriptive conversation, authority figures refer to outside text to validate their normative claims rather than to first-hand accounts of the participants in a problematic situation (165, 167). Samantha writes, "Putting it off, with a video no less, is not the answer. Basic problem solving techniques is." Marlene emphasizes the need for dialogue among the participants in the situation, "Predictable. Turn to 'text' not people. Yes, dealing with the misbehaviour on a large scale is a collective teacher/admin problem, but it is not solved by a frigging video. It is solved by talking together!" (167)

In their responses to the story, the teachers diagnose a speech situation which effectively precludes the reflective conversation which is essential for the development of educational practice. The term "educational practice" refers to a purposeful and theorized pedagogy. We, teachers, require common understandings to give our actions purpose. Motivational speeches, nifty tips or technical quick-fix solutions do not lead to common understandings but silence us. We need to make pedagogical choices available to criticism and reflection in a larger conversation in which all the participants may speak from their own viewpoints and remain open to those around. Such dialogue requires attentiveness to the lived experiences of teachers and of students. It also requires us to investigate how our common understandings and purposes are largely conditioned by the language game(s) in which we participate.

Chapter five:

Narrative inquiry and the reflective conversations of teachers and students

My concern in the previous narrative was to illustrate the limitations of technical and prescriptive discourse in educational conversation. As an action researcher, I wish to go beyond merely rejecting this way of speaking about teaching as a technical activity which can be reduced to a series of distinct and describable behaviours or "nifty tips." I wish to research and outline alternative ways of speaking and thinking about teaching. In my view, the search for this alternative requires a shift from prescriptive conversation to reflective conversation. It means first giving up "...the myth that there are right or wrong things to do in education, which can be generalized and established without reference to a fully articulated conception of education and particular circumstances" (Barrow 1984 p.264-5). The reflective conversation – which takes the place of prescriptions based on decontextualized generalizations – depends on at least two conditions. First, the participants in the conversation articulate their educational purposes and their views about how children learn. Second, the conversation is contextualized within the events of the classroom. This brings to mind the reflective conversations I had with Shirley at the beginning of my career as an elementary school teacher. Barrow (1984) writes:

> The teacher will have to make his own decisions, and he will have to do so
> in the light of a general appreciation of factors that may make a difference,
> combined with a pretty clear idea of what he is doing and why, and some
> insight into the particular children he encounters (p. 265).

Barrow calls for a genuine teacher education that stresses conceptual clarity and the capacity for autonomous judgement rather than a teacher training that aspires to transmit techniques for best practice (p. 264). In essence, "...the point of this exercise is not to

study philosophy of education, but to ensure that the students really do articulate full and coherent conceptions of their own (p. 266). As an undergraduate student and during the first years of my teaching career, I did not develop such coherent conceptions mainly because the prescriptive conversations I participated in were divorced from practical considerations.

Dewey's pragmatism has a lot to offer to action researchers because it foregrounds the mutual entailment of theory and practice. My practical considerations, embedded within narrative, become theorized once they critically interweave descriptions of educational purposes, actions, events, and experiences. However, a critical stance properly draws on the perspectives of others. For this reason, there is no reason to believe that one narrator is sufficient to describe classroom events or interpret the students' experiences in a pluralistic narrative inquiry.

This chapter will conclude with a discussion of the possible benefits of multiple narrators within narrative inquiry because the teachers' responses to the following narrative have guided my thinking in this direction. I wish to suggest three conditions for the possibility of an action research collective engaged in narrative inquiry:

1. The conversations of this collective help the narrating researcher turn and return to the reflective question: What am I doing and why? The members of the collective have entered into relationships of trust which assure everyone that the development of practical understanding is the primary purpose of the collective effort. Other purposes, such as the evaluation of teachers by administrators during the activities of

the research collective or a teacher's attempt to impress colleagues with dramatic narratives of professional transformation, would undermine the collective effort.

2. The narrative refers to the perspectives of most, if not all, participants in the situation under description in the narrative. This necessitates a research text with multiple narrators. I believe this means that the researcher clears a space for other narrators within the text. Their statements would appear in their entirety and would remain untouched by the researcher within this space.

3. Members of the research collective are physically present and participate in the situation under description (e.g. the classroom). These participants offer other critical perspectives which either accompany the narrative in the form of footnotes or marginalia or are embedded within the narrative, itself. Later, I will discuss these suggestions in light of the following narrative and the teachers' responses to it.

The following narrative attempts to explore learning in a dialogic classroom and makes the implicit claim that the discourse patterns in such a classroom are not distorted. The teacher is not the source of authority, knowledge, and information. Rather, the act of teaching means making opportunities for collective inquiry, research, and discussion available to children.

Narrative: Talking Together Like Friends

At school human beings learn when their dialogue resembles what Socrates called "talking together like friends." These friends speak and act with each other to create conditions for the possibility of discovery and learning. As a classroom teacher, I value activities that allow children to enter into such conversational relationships with each

other. The experiences of a group of grade-three children raising twenty-five butterflies allowed for such dialogue.[237], [238], [239], [240], [241], [242]

As the teacher, my first task was to help the children organize and clean the classroom space required to raise our twenty-five butterflies. Each child accepted responsibility for one larva which was kept in an individual container. Initially there were daily observations and measurement of the growth of the larvae.[243], [244], [245], [246]

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[237] Impressive (Ron Kofman)

[238] Sounds like an inviting, warm classroom. Butterflies – what a great project. (Mary Parker)

[239] Our school is much like this although dynamics change as staff changes! (Jane Ayers)

[240] Cooperative learning and classroom dialogue (Andrew Jackson)

[241] "Talking together like friends" is the basis of every classroom. That's what creates a sense of community. (Orysia Hull)

[242] Concrete experience-based learning. (Gianfranco Riva)

[243] Cooperation. This is a project that the students will remember forever! (Mary Parker)

[244] What a wonderful learning opportunity for language, math, sciences, etc.! (Jane Ayers)

[245] Engagement; responsibility in small amounts, expectation that this will be done; curiosity continues the motivation. (Orysia Hull)

[246] Each child is empowered with a meaningful task. (Gianfranco Riva)

The children became fascinated with the metamorphic stages as the caterpillars grew and built their chrysalides.[247] Students helped each other record their observations, feed their adopted pet and eventually saw them transform into butterflies. They sketched their treasured pet, created animation projects at the computer, and measured growth in centimetres. They experimented with more refined drawing techniques and paid careful attention to capturing the colorful beauty of their butterflies and the symmetry of their wings.[248],[249],[250],[251],[252],[253]

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[247] Peek students' interest (Andrew Jackson)

[248] Lovely! (Mike Smythe)

[249] Wow! Wow! Wish I was a student in that room. The theme seems to draw in all the subject areas. (Mary Parker)

[250] This is great stuf((Jane Ayers)

[251] Awe, amazement, joy of discovery, support to each other, sense of we can do this, experience with many ways of knowing butterflies. (Orysia Hull)

[252] Good integrated lesson. (Samantha Phillips)

[253] Often classroom experiences are too simplified and fail to motivate. The richness in the details of a butterfly is a limitless source of wonder. All aspects of the curriculum can be touched on with a rich subject matter. (Gianfranco Riva)

Each child accepted responsibility for planning and developing a portfolio which told the story of their discoveries. There was much peer conferencing as they drew detailed sketches and edited their daily journal writing which recounted their experiences.[254]

Every morning they gleefully entered the room to check on the progress of their butterflies and those of their classmates. Students were diligent in maintaining a hygienic classroom space which we deemed necessary for a safe butterfly nursery.[255] Remarkably, the children's enthusiasm sparked community interest.[256] Siblings, parents, students, and teachers dropped in to observe the growth of our butterflies and encouraged the children in their project. In conversation with their guests, the children articulated their experiences thoughtfully and confidently.[257], [258], [259]

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[254] Personal responsibility, group responsibility, "learning is social," theory sharing. (Orysia Hull)

[255] Eagerness, intrinsic motivation through engagement, students set rules for what was necessary to maintain space. (Orysia Hull)

[256] Pebbles in a pond – the ever increasing circles; best PR a school can heave, develops faith in their school for the community. (Orysia Hull)

[257] Community involvement. It just goes to show that when children are interested and feel a part of something how well they can do! (Mary Parker)

[258] School and community involvement instills pride in a child. (Samantha Phillips)

[259] Enthusiasm that spreads contagiously outside the confines of the classroom. (Gianfranco Riva)

My decision to let each child be responsible for an individual larva was not without consequences. Despite their responsible nurturing and daily feeding, three caterpillars died. It was challenging to deal with this issue even though we had talked about this possibility. The three students who lost their caterpillars decided to help care for their classmates' pets. The three children also prepared the sugar solution (simulated pollen) and arranged flowers in the butterfly observation box once butterflies emerged and were transferred from the small individual containers to this new location.[260], [261], [262], [263], [264], [265], [266]

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[260] This whole story is beautiful. I feel only the positive aspects were presented, but globally this is still possible. How did the students who would be getting a helper feel: "You killed your butterfly, now you want to kill mine? No WAY!" (Ron Kofman)

[261] That is certainly a life lesson. (Mary Parker)

[262] Good opportunity to discuss grief without really extreme emotions! (Jane Ayers)

[263] Real life issues; life, transformation, death (of human beings) dealt with indirectly and somewhat discreetly. (Andrew Jackson)

[264] It was an individual project in the sense that each child has his/her own caterpillar but it was also meaning making in community. Luckily, the community could accommodate these three children in other ways. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[265] Real-life experiences; reality "feels" different than possibility; those who suffered loss still remained part of the community of learners; opportunity to make own decision; creative thinking; rights and responsibilities in a democracy; preparation for citizenship and personal empowerment. (Orysia Hull)

[266] An unexpected advantage is gained from the loss of the caterpillars. (Gianfranco Riva)

We talked about the twenty-one-day life cycle of this species. We read about how the butterflies travel, perhaps for a distance of miles and miles to lay their eggs. We again spoke about raising our caterpillars to adulthood with the intention of releasing them into nature. It was a melancholy but also happy occasion for the children to release the first butterflies. We opened the observation box, allowed the butterflies to land on our hands and flutter away in the wind. We observed their tentative landings on the grass and nearby branches. We went back for a few days to search for them in the park. We found some adapting to their new environment. One child in particular said, "Goodbye Mickey, have fun. Have a great life!"[267], [268], [269], [270]

We also discovered a butterfly with asymmetrical wings. It was poorly coordinated, had difficulty drinking our sugar solution, and fell into the small feeding bowls.[271] We decided to intervene and placed it on one of the fresh flowers in the observation box to let it drink the nectar of the pollen. We had a decision to make. Do we raise this butterfly for

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[267] Once again – What an experience! The children will never forget this. (Mary Parker)

[268] I would like to be involved in a project like this! (Jane Ayers)

[269] Our place in the world; ecology; our responsibility to the planet; critical thinking: "with every gain there is a loss; with every loss, a gain". (Orysia Hull)

[270] So many natural lessons to be learned outside the confines of their desks. However, commitment and caring is mandatory. (Samantha Phillips)

[271] There is a subtle reference to real life – i.e. caring for handicapped people. (Andrew Jackson)

its entire life cycle in the observation box or do we release it outdoors? Children were concerned with drastic changes in temperature as well as the wind factor. We agreed to release it in a vegetable and flower garden adjacent to the school park. Interestingly, the children wanted it to be outdoors with the other butterflies. One student brought up the perspective of the short life span and of the existing food chain. Perhaps this insect will help nourish birds, a natural predator. It seemed a courageous and realistic decision for students to make in releasing this butterfly into nature.[272],[273],[274]

Students worked together to choreograph butterfly dance movements to music. They were patient in helping friends learn the difference between right and left for a circular dance, offering clues to remember choreography. They created braided crowns with ribbons and beads for an air of celebration. They tie-dyed fabric wings I had prepared for them. They practised the technical aspects of representing the butterfly's metamorphosis in their dance. The performance took eight days to create. They were confident and proud of their performance during the school concert.[275],[276],[277],[278],[279]

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[272] Great idea to make the children all part of the decision process. (Mary Parker)

[273] Learning about life! Survival of the fittest. (Jane Ayers)

[274] Dealing with the big important questions of life, not with worksheets but things that really matter, such as making tough decisions. (Orysia Hull)

[275] What a wonderful reflection! It reminded me of a situation I encountered a year ago (I think). The teacher taught a grade one Immersion class and had her students engaged in a similar inquiry. The children were involved in all aspects of their learning. Reciprocal teaching and learning was taking place. I lived vicariously through the teacher's descriptions of the unfolding events.

I just finished reading several articles on child-centred, anti-racist education and suggest it be characterized by:

- **a constructivist approach** - a constructivist teacher takes a personal, adaptive view of knowledge and teaches for conceptual understanding (Watson & Konicek, "Teaching for Conceptual Change," *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1990);

- **a supportive classroom** - it's the sense students are making of what's going on that drives instruction, teachers take the lead from the students...'leading from behind' (Newman, "Building a Supportive Classroom," 1997, *Teaching Today for Tomorrow*, no.9);

- **classrooms where teachers and students engage in inquiry** - members carry out inquiries on topics to which they have a personal commitment and who engage in collaborative, critical, and constructive dialogue about the problems and issues that arise. "In such a community the roles of teacher and learner are interchangeable, for all are learning and at the same time, all are helping others to learn (p. 31, Wells and Wells, "Talk for Learning and Teaching," In: *Constructing Knowledge Together: Classrooms as Centers of Inquiry and Literacy*, Heinemann);

- **teachers making visible the invisible** (Bigelow, "The Human Lives Behind the Labels," Phi Delta Kappan, October 1997);

- **teachers and students negotiate the curriculum** (Boomer, 1992);

- **a critical pedagogy** – "a theorized practice of teaching that opposes the dominant ideologies, institutions and material conditions of society which maintain

socioeconomic inequality......that aims to develop students' critical awareness of those oppressive social forces, including school structures and knowledges." Lankashear and McLaren suggest, "Critical literacy makes possible a more adequate and accurate reading of the world, on the basis of which as Freire and others put it, people can enter into rewriting the world into a formation in which their interests, identities and legitimate aspirations are more fully present and are present more equally." (p. 6, Morgan, *Critical Literacy in the Classroom*);

- **reading and writing against the grain...oppositional reading, creating ruptures**. Before I can aspire to be a child-centred, anti-racist educator I have to know what my own attitudes and beliefs are. I have to uncover my assumptions about teaching and learning. How can I engage my students in critical literacy if I am not critically literate? Changing the way I do things requires a commitment to engage in action research, in reflection, in collecting critical incidents...to try to see the world through the eyes of my students and to hear each of their voices.

I would like to share the following passage... it appeared in the *Teaching K-8* journal in September 1995. Simplistic in its approach, it serves to remind us of the responsibility we have as teachers... perhaps it could be renamed "The Polisher of Critical Stars"

The Star Polisher by Leah Becks

I have a great job in the universe of occupations. What do I do? I'm a "star polisher."

It's a very important job. If you want to know how important, just go out at night and look at the stars twinkling and sparkling.

You see, I'm a teacher. The stars are the children in my class. My job is to take them in - whatever shape they come - and shine and buff them and then send them out to take their places as bright little twinkling beacons in the sky.

They come into my room in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes they're bent, tarnished, dirty, crinkly, and broken. Some stars are cuddly, soft, and sweet. Some stars are prickly and thorny.

As I buff, polish, and teach my little stars, I tell them that the world cannot do without them. I tell them they can do anything they set their minds to do. I tell them they can be the brightest, shiniest stars in the sky and the world will be a better place because of them.

Each night as I look at the sky, I'm reminded of my very important job and awesome responsibility. I go and get my soft buffing cloth and my bottle of polish in preparation for my class of little stars.

(Anne Cottingham)

[276] Sounds like a great environment for learning. Being a science person, I might tend to focus more on the experimental learning aspect. From your perspective I can see the value of the creation of an environment conducive to interactive language. (Jennifer Harcourt)

[277] I'm speechless! This whole process leaves me in awe. How wonderful for the students and the teachers to have participated in this activity. (Mary Parker)

[278] What a beautiful educational experience! This teacher knew how to plan a meaningful unit and teach it in the classroom. This is the type of story which is nice to listen to and share with others. This story offers an important lesson: real life stuff is the basis of a good life lesson. This story would be superb for professional inservice training. It can be a source of interesting questions and dialogue. (Annick Bourdeau)

As a classroom teacher, I am continually observing and reassessing the value of shared learning experiences.[280] I believe this experience affirmed their ability to engage in meaningful, imaginative ways of learning in a dialogic classroom environment. [281], [282], [283], [284], [285], [286], [287], [288], [289], [290], [291]

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[279] Integration of all aspects of the curriculum: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, representing; integration of curricula; role of arts; cooperative learning; problem-solving and decision; opportunities for each student to discover and develop own interests and strengths. (Orysia Hull)

[280] Classroom research, reflection, pedagogy. (Orysia Hull)

[281] To me it seems clear that you are looking at the teacher as "facilitator" on three levels of involvement: with the student, with the parent and community, with the admin and colleagues. The text is heavily weighted towards a positive response to the third about the butterflies – this is a dream situation: cross-disciplinary, real, and meaningful. No question (for me) best learning. Note, however, this is with grade three. A much more 'compliant' audience with parent(s) willingness. The situation in #2 Control Games is closer to my classroom and admin experience. I have not taught elementary. So, in my experience, I feel (and I actually know) that it is harder to integrate subject areas and field trips take endless paperwork and cooperation, and there is much more concern with rules and so-called order. It would be so cool to raise butterflies in my grade 10 classroom, but because my room is used by three other teachers, how could I possibly put responsibility on a student? Last week some dork from another class stole my stapler. Last week some twit from another class dumped the contents of the three-hole punch into the vent system

so if you turn on the air you get confetti. I guess the concerns in #2 strike me as ones everyone needs to address before we can all raise butterflies. #1 hit very close to home. I'm surprised, amazed, and pleased that the author and I ever broke our cocoons. (Marlene Milne)

[282] Lovely. Frankly, this seems a little fairytale-ish. What about the sadistic kid who pulled the wings of the three butterflies? What about the boys who said that dancing is for Sissies? Surely, the interest in the butterflies did not turn the classroom into a learning paradise. What I find difficult is that even an activity that will engage 90% of the students won't engage everybody. (Mike Smythe)

[283] Ah, the ideal perfect classroom! Don't we all wish things would be this perfect!! I wonder where all the special-needs kids are, or the disruptive students, and only 25 students in a class? What a dream. This story is obviously written by a teacher decades ago, who was in their first five years of teaching. Okay, I'm being cynical; but this sounds too perfect. It is the ideal though – experiential, meaningful, integrated learning. Although many of us have had brief experiences like this, to have a year like this would be heaven! (Jennifer Eisner)

[284] I think I could learn a lot from this teacher. Is it you Matt? (Ron Kofman)

[285] What a great story!! I really wish that I was a student in that particular room. Not only did the students feel part of a community, but they also participated in a rewarding academic process that I am sure they will remember for the rest of their lives. I have seen this type of a class environment a few times before both in elementary and middle school. The children, as well as the teacher are excited about being part of the class and there is a lot of creativity that is fostered as a result of the trust and enthusiasm. I really like how

the start of the story says: "At schools human beings learn when their dialogue resembles what Socrates called 'talking together like friends' These friends speak and act with each other to create conditions for the possibility of learning." That is a very beautiful thought. I picture a classroom of students working together in groups and learning from each other. I was also very impressed with the way situations such as the death of the three caterpillars and the decision whether or not to release the poorly coordinated butterfly were handled as a classroom group. It showed respect for nature as well as the feelings of the members of the group. (Mary Parker)

[286] What a dynamic learning opportunity: integrating so many areas of the curriculum. Wow! She or he succeeded! I'm sure each and everyone of the students remembers something about the whole process. This is learning at its finest – teaching, too! (Jane Ayers)

[287] **Cooperative learning:** learning from teacher and from one another's' strengths and weaknesses; **variety of instruction and activities** tied into the pet butterflies; **linking education to real life is excellent:** need to relate school to students' everyday life, make it practical, make learning interesting and exciting, involve students, student centered; **dialogue leads to understanding:** communication builds a relationship essential to an effective classroom.

Mr. Meiers, sorry I got this to you so late. The past few weeks have been saturated with essays, exams, and the quest for decent summer employment. My answers are opinions, many of which do not have enough experience behind them. Much of it I used myself in the classroom with overall effective results (i.e. dialogue, co-op learning, instructional variety). Much of the research I have done this year enforces these theories and I look

forward to future opportunities to test them in more depth. Best of luck. Thank you. (Andrew Jackson)

[288] This discussion is about real stuff – life and death issues – moral and ethical issues. It requires knowing about food chains, predators etc. which is integrated with a student's lived experience. It is understandings learned in context through discussion. The real stuff is risky because it is messy – because you can't predict with 100% certainty how things will turn out – but then again real life isn't predictable either and school should be about learning in the here and now not as preparation for life as an adult in some distant and far removed future as an adult. I'm not saying this very well. (Elizabeth Fromm)

[289] I would use this story in many different ways. Each of the paragraphs addresses an issue or theory in education. Like a good book that is re-read many times and from which learning is extended during and after each reading, I could "milk" this story in different ways at many different times.

A comparison/contrast to assertive discipline would explain why assertive discipline doesn't work. Examining life for a child in Frau Schmidt's class, in the assertive discipline class, and in the "Socrates" class would help us comprehend the differences between education and training; individual and community responsibilities and rights; citizenship for business or for democracy.

Matt, I want to thank you for giving me this opportunity to respond and to think about each story. I was fascinated with each piece. I am currently doing some preparation for working with early years administrators. Our topic is "What does a literate classroom look like?" These selections you have put together address the intangibles that create a literate environment (see Brian Cambourne "Conditions for literacy learning" in

Language Arts. Also Thomas Barone in *Teaching Today for Tomorrow*) A literate environment is more than a collection of strategies; it is a way of living or being in which teachers have meta-cognitive awareness of the tangible and intangible elements of classroom life. The "Socrates" classroom is an excellent example of a literate environment. (Orysia Hull)

[290] Dialogue is always an important tool – both for students and teachers. Hands-on learning is necessary to be done with controls and limits set. You still want the dialogue to be focussed & not about "Pokemon"! (Samantha Phillips)

[291] The above is an admirable example of a perfect learning environment. Particular care, however, must be taken to ensure that a teacher anticipates as much as possible the extension in the various domains of knowledge in order to help children develop a sense of width and depth of knowledge. (Gianfranco Riva)

In my view, this story represents an attempt to describe how an integrated unit successfully unfolded in a grade-three classroom. What surprised me was the extent to which this story about classroom curriculum polarized the readers. This polarization is the key issue which emerged in my reading of the responses. One group of readers doubted the verisimilitude of the narrative. Another group of teachers embraced the trajectory of the narrative, accepted it as true, and in their responses interpreted its pedagogical significance. The polarized reading-responses of the collective do not signal mere disagreements about the educational benefits of a thematic and integrated approach to teaching and learning in grade three. Something else appears to be at stake: each teacher's subjectivity, his/her sense of professional identity and understanding of children as agents with a capacity for conscious and decisive action.

1. Skeptical reception of the narrative

The skeptical reception of the narrative is expressed in comments such as: "Lovely. Frankly, this seems a little fairytale-ish" (248, 282); "This story is beautiful. I feel only the positive aspects were presented..." (248); "I wonder where all the special-needs kids are, or the disruptive students..." (283). For these readers, the story does not correspond to their experience of teaching and learning at school. Maybe, they do not imagine this particular unit playing out in their classroom because they are preoccupied with other questions, such as: How do I deal with my "special-needs kids" or "disruptive students?"

Mike writes,

> Lovely. Frankly, this seems a little fairytale-ish. What about the sadistic
> kid who pulled the wings of the three butterflies? What about the boys

who said that dancing is for Sissies? Surely, the interest in the butterflies did not turn the classroom into a learning paradise. What I find difficult is that even an activity that will engage 90% of the students won't engage everybody. (282)

Ron writes,

> This whole story is beautiful. I feel only the positive aspects were presented, but globally this is still possible. How did the students who would be getting a helper feel: 'You killed your butterfly, now you want to kill mine? No WAY!' " (260)

Jennifer writes,

> Ah, the ideal perfect classroom! Don't we all wish things would be this perfect!! I wonder where all the special-needs kids are, or the disruptive students, and only 25 students in a class? What a dream. This story is obviously written by a teacher decades ago, who was in their first five years of teaching. Okay, I'm being cynical; but this sounds too perfect. It is the ideal though – experiential, meaningful, integrated learning. Although many of us have had brief experiences like this, to have a year like this would be heaven!" (283)

These writers do not object to the narrator's educational purposes or the planning of the integrated unit. Ostensibly, their criticism is not directed against the narrator's view of experiential, meaningful, and integrated learning. Rather, they suggest that the problematic aspects of teaching the butterfly unit in this particular classroom were omitted and left unexplored in the narrative. Their responses suggest that the grade-three class under description in the narrative does not exist in their experience of the school teaching. I also believe that the teachers imagine and describe difficulties which they might encounter in the course of teaching such an integrated thematic unit in their own classroom. Their apprehensions are reflected in the sarcastic tone of the responses. This is an intuitive assessment because the teachers do not explicitly discuss or explore their own practices in the response.

2. Interpretation of the narrative as an example of meaningful learning

I will now turn to the first group who discussed the significance of this narrative for classroom practice at length. Mary writes that the narrative describes "an inviting, warm classroom," adding later that she wished she were "a student in that room." Her comment, "Butterflies – what a project!" refers to curriculum design. She notes that "the theme seems to draw in all the subject areas" (238, 249). Gianfranco also touches on this idea, "Often classroom experiences are too simplified and fail to motivate. The richness in the details of a butterfly is a limitless source of wonder. All aspects of the curriculum can be touched on with a rich subject matter" (253). Jane emphatically writes, "I would like to be involved in a project like this!" To me, her statement suggests to me that she would like to plan such a unit with colleagues and team-teach it in her classroom.

The readers remarked on the narrator's ability to give the theme momentum by involving the children and to respond to the classroom situation as it evolved. I will refer to a few examples. Orysia writes of "Awe, amazement, joy of discovery, support to each other, sense of we can do this, experience with many ways of knowing butterflies" (251). She emphasizes that the teacher encouraged personal responsibility, group responsibility, socially constructed knowledge, and theory sharing (254). Orysia also believes that the teacher let the children deal "with the big important questions of life; not worksheets but things that really matter; making tough decisions" (274). Elizabeth notes, "It was an individual project in the sense that each child has his/her own caterpillar but it was also meaning making in community. Luckily, the community could accommodate these three children (whose caterpillars died) in other ways" (264). She adds later,

This discussion is about real stuff – life and death issues – moral and ethical issues. It requires knowing about food chains, predators etc. which is integrated with a student's lived experience. It is understandings learned in context through discussion. The real stuff is risky because it is messy – because you can't predict with 100% certainty how things will turn out – but then again real life isn't predictable either and school should be about learning in the here and now not as preparation for life as an adult in some distant and far removed future as an adult (287).

It seems to me that the narrative resonated for these readers – in the sense that it expressed or amplified their educational values.

3. Contextualizing the narrative within one's own teaching experience

Marlene shows us how her critical view of the three narratives is contextualized within her own experience.

> To me it seems clear that you are looking at the teacher as "facilitator" on three levels of involvement: with the student, with the parent and community, with the admin and colleagues. The text is heavily weighted towards a positive response to the third about the butterflies – this is a dream situation: cross-disciplinary, real, and meaningful. No question (for me) best learning. Note, however, this is with grade three. A much more 'compliant' audience with parent(s) willingness. The situation in #2 Control Games is closer to my classroom and admin experience. I have not taught elementary. So, in my experience, I feel (and I actually know) that it is harder to cross-discipline and field trips take endless paperwork and cooperation, and there is much more concern with rules and so-called order. It would be so cool to raise butterflies in my grade 10 classroom, but because my room is used by three other teachers, how could I possibly put responsibility on a student? Last week some dork from another class stole my stapler. Last week some twit from another class dumped the contents of the three-hole punch into the vent system so if you turn on the air you get confetti. I guess the concerns in #2 strike me as ones everyone needs to address before we can all raise butterflies. (281)

Marlene sees the textual juxtaposition of the three narratives which I assembled for the readers "heavily weighted towards a positive response to the third about the butterflies."

However, the problematic issues raised in the second story are closer to her experience of teaching in an inner-city high school where some students consistently seek to disrupt the activities of the teacher.

The wide range of responses foregrounds the plurality of this research collective. The teachers have brought their own understanding and experiences of teaching to their reading of these narratives. The limitation of the collective is that none of the participants had direct access to the classroom situation under description in the last narrative. The responses would surely have differed in unpredictable ways. I am thinking particularly about Ron and Mike's ironic questioning which attempts to redescribe and cast doubt on the trajectory of the narrative. The third narrative implicitly goes head to head with a conception of classroom curriculum in which children get their information from textbooks, worksheets, and teacher lectures. Perhaps, Ron and Mike favor paper work over the kind of experiential learning outlined in the narrative. Perhaps, they have even taught a unit on butterflies using pencil and paper activities. The narrative would have challenged their assumptions about the way such a unit should be taught. However, as observers in the situation under description, they might have overturned their own assumptions about the pragmatic benefits of experiential learning or they might have noticed and described elements of the classroom situation which differed significantly from the researcher's narrative. Participant-observers are in a stronger position to author oppositional narratives which may convince the researcher to transform or enlarge her view of the classroom situation. In light of this experience, I am now willing to argue that

narrative inquiry as a form of action research requires participant observers who, themselves, can recount other views of the situation under description.

Chapter six:

Reflections on the use-value of teacher narrative

At the conclusion of this study, the reader of this thesis may still wonder how the textual maneuvers of the research narratives represented action research. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that narrative inquiry may become a form of action research when teachers use such stories to construct representations of their practice with the intention of reflecting more fully on their practices and their agency in the school system. The purpose, however, is not only a deeper understanding of the teacher's own practices. To complete the action research cycle, teacher researchers who form themselves into a research collective create an opportunity to dialogue with one another in an effort to **enact** their transformed understandings and to **reflect** on the arising forms of practice. The research design of my study did not complete the action research cycle. The thesis only goes so far as to document representations of my evolving professional subjectivity cast in narrative and made public to a collective of teachers to elicit reflection and discussion.

The practice of making teacher narratives public raises the following questions in my mind:

1. How can teacher action researchers transform their professional subjectivity and their practices in the exercise of writing narrative and provide indications of this transformation in the text?

2. How can we situate and contextualize teacher narratives profitably in the action research conversations of teachers?

The present study allows me to offer some tentative answers to these questions. These answers will be colored by my experience of writing the three research narratives and reading the responses of the research participants.

This study has led me to cast doubt on two preconceptions I had about the importance of verisimilitude in teacher narrative. The research design compromised two conditions which I previously considered essential for the possibility of an action research collective engaged in narrative inquiry. I will state these two conditions and outline how my understanding of them has changed.

1. At the outset of the study, I believed that the research narrative must aspire to the value of verisimilitude. Without verisimilitude I expected there would be no meaningful discussion among the readers. The research narratives of this study put this notion to the test. The responses indicated that in some readings of the narratives verisimilitude was indeed not achieved. For these readers the narratives conformed to the Hollywood plot and the deployment of one-dimensional characters. Surprising to me, these readers were nevertheless engaged in ways I would not have expected. In a number of cases, the reading-responses show that these narratives invited interruption. At critical junctures, the research participants disrupted the Hollywood effect of my stories by inscribing pointed counter-narratives into the text. The complex juxtaposition of readers' multiple narratives illustrated both acts of reading

with and against my stories. What the research narratives may have lacked in verisimilitude was made up by the responses that the readers introduced into the text. To me this suggests that the Hollywood effect may prove useful in prompting discussion.

2. At the outset of the study, I believed that members of an action research collective should be physically present and know the situation problematized in the research narrative. This would provide the researcher with a common frame of reference. The researcher and the readers in the collective would be participant observers in the same situation and still bring their own perspectives to it. I now believe that this is not always necessary. My view has shifted. A Hollywood-style narrative introduced by one of the participants in an action research collective may in fact enable the researcher and readers to map out areas of common concern.

I will now relate the two questions which I raised at the beginning of this chapter to the experiences which I gathered in the course of my study. The first question refers to the activity of writing research narratives for the purposes of transforming one's professional subjectivity and of providing indications of this transformation in the narrative. On page 39 of this thesis I suggest that my research narratives represent attempts on my part to describe, explore and think about three forms of teacher practice: the aggressive and systematic intimidation of non-compliant children, the studied manipulation and management of children's behaviour, and the construction of a classroom curriculum which seeks to invite and engage children in meaningful learning. I also emphasized that

these forms of teacher practice reflect powerful and conflicting currents in the institutional culture(s) in which I have participated for the last fourteen years.

I believed that writing and making these narratives public for a group of teachers and then studying their responses would help me construct a clearer sense of myself as a human agent in the school system. In the act of writing these narratives, I saw **myself** playfully involved in a process of authoring a more coherent professional subjectivity. This process involved describing forms of teaching practice in the school system, choosing characters to exemplify them and situating these characters in a way that represents a moral comment on their action.

The writing process helped me think about how I wanted these currents to inform my day-to-day teaching practice. To construct a coherent professional subjectivity, teachers need to interpret the conflicted culture of the public school system and identify courses of action which are permissible **and** justifiable as educationally and morally sound.

In the writing of the research narratives, I used the story grammar of the Hollywood plot to foreground these currents and to playfully engage with them. At the outset of the study, I feared that this approach might undermine the action research process. Connelly & Clandinin (1998) expressly warn their readers about the Hollywood plot in which all problems come to a happy resolution. Eco (1989) writes about kitsch as "the prefabrication and imposition of an effect" (p. 181). Adherents of critical theory may consider the Hollywood plot and kitsch to be negative elements in action research

arguing that they transform the possibility of critical inquiry into its opposite, uncritical acceptance of the factual. However, it does not make sense to think of kitsch or the Hollywood plot as overpowering textual qualities which determine the readers' responses. For narrative inquiry to move into the field of action research, the research stories need to be situated in a conversation in which the participants understand the conventions of narrative and storytelling. In an open conversation where all the readers are free to speak their mind, attempts by the author to impose an effect on the readers will probably give rise to counter-narratives and all manner of criticism.

I identify with the enacted belief-system of the child-centered teacher of the third narrative. This teacher avoids methods which, as Dewey (1974) would say, reduce the pupil to a recording phonograph, or one who stands at the end of a pipe line receiving material conducted from a distant reservoir of learning. This teacher constructs

> problems and projects that come within the scope and capacities of the
>
> experience of the learner and which have a sufficiently long span so
>
> that they raise new questions, introduce new and related undertakings,
>
> and create a demand for fresh knowledge" (Dewey, p. 423).

In my view, the narrative illustrates this understanding of child-centered teaching. I attribute the sense of common purpose and the harmonious relationships among the characters in the story to the teacher's ability to engage the children in a wide range of integrated and thematic activities. Overstating this point in the narrative does not blind me (nor other readers) to the problematic aspects of the school system which work against child-centered teaching practices. The use-value of the final narrative is that it

identifies the conditions for learning which I want to make possible in my classroom. In this sense, the story describes and helps me articulate the telos and the intentionality of my current teaching practice. The story does not identify the problems which I might encounter in pursuing this goal. That is the task of the two previous narratives.

The first two stories retrace and reshape experiences which I wanted to interpret and come to terms with in my ongoing effort to become a child-centered educator. These interpretations are already provided in the opening pages of chapters three and four. It is not necessary to repeat them here. It suffices to say that these narratives describe and caricaturize educationally harmful ways of relating to children. I suggest that as teacher action researchers, we may benefit from examining how memories of educationally unsound experiences continue to inscribe our current practices. Therefore, research narratives would profitably be contextualized in a detailed discussion of the purposes which they serve in the teacher-narrator's ongoing development. In the presence of such an interpretive text the action research cycle may become explicit and the narrative may provide indications of how and why the writer's subjectivity and practice are evolving.

The practice of making teacher narratives public also raises another question of interest: How can we profitably situate and contextualize teacher narratives in the action research conversations of teachers? The text that has emerged in response to my research narratives in chapters three, four, and five suggests one way of representing the plurality of a research community. Rather than letting public research narratives "speak for themselves," we would profit from situating the stories in the conversations of research

groups. I am thinking of individual reader-responses represented in the form of footnotes but also of audiotaped and transcribed conversations of teachers speaking together and bringing their own experiences of teaching to the narrative. As the story is thus appropriated by the research collective, other layers of meaning emerge. The public text not only offers a story but also a critical conversation.

Critique becomes possible when the participants in a research collective recognize possibilities for turning points in their practice. Playfully engaging with narrative can help them plan alternate forms of action and enact them. For this effort, we absolutely require the support of a research collective. I believe that action researchers engaged in narrative inquiry may profit from writing about a wide range of personally significant teaching and learning **experiences** and from paying particular attention to their own silent **dialogue with the text**. However, only in taking the text to an ongoing conversation among critical friends who bring their own pedagogical resources, experiences, and interests to the discussion, can we collectively begin to imagine new possibilities for educational practices our classrooms and schools. Public accounts of these conversations and of narrative inquiry as a form of critical action research may raise decisive questions about actual collective experiences of attempting to initiate change in classrooms. The ongoing conversation will in large measure reflect our evolving understanding(s) of concrete pedagogical possibilities and the limits of our responsibility and creativity "within the lived experience of highly problematic organisational and political conditions" (Winter, 1997).

When we, as action researchers, deliberate with ourselves and each other in search of a right or good course of action, we do not exercise a technical skill but what Gadamer (1986) calls "real reasonableness" and *phronesis* (p.38). Only in dialogue with myself and with others can I get "beyond the prejudices of prevailing conventions" (Gadamer, 1986, p.43) to a better understanding of my contingent role as a classroom teacher and its creative possibilities.

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