Points of Departure, Points of Viewing:
Narrative Inquiry through a Digital Lens

by

Julia Leong
B.Ed., Simon Fraser University, 1999
B.A., University of British Columbia, 1988

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Approval

Name: Julia Leong
Degree: Master of Education
Title of Thesis: Points of Departure, Points of Viewing; Narrative Inquiry through a Digital Lens

Examining Committee:

Dr. Allan MacKinnon, Associate Professor
Senior Supervisor

Dr. Michael Ling, Limited Term Lecturer
Committee Member

Dr. Carl Leggo, Professor
UBC
External Examiner

Date Defended/Approved: May 16th, 2011
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Abstract

This paper is about examining the process of meaning making and the experience of making photographs for opening new possibilities for teaching and learning. Now that we are entering a world of digital imaging as an additional ubiquitous tool, teachers and students might consider the use of visual images to deepen their knowledge of their own work. Writing will remain important, but not sufficient.

By creating images, not of the classroom, but of their daily living, teachers can greatly expand their own sense of perspective; seeing things in new ways and becoming aware of what they attend to and how they experience everyday living.

By developing concepts through photography, writing field notes, conducting literature reviews, and through discussion, the author invites the reader into a conversation that includes stories of experiences about the process of learning and teaching, about digital media technology, about the relationship of photos to written texts and about attending to lived experiences. This paper is also an inquiry into representations of identity and living inquiry. Why are we here, practically, philosophically, and pedagogically? Who is the self that teaches? What do we know about ourselves or what can we learn about ourselves that can help us understand our students’ learning? The result of this exploratory research is a series of practical, methodological, and theoretical questions to inform subsequent phases of research into learning systems, curriculum design, and pedagogy.
Thank you to my family for all their love, endless support and for instilling me with the love of learning by your modelling and encouragement.

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1 Introduction

“Education is at once a narrative and political enterprise and...the more we know about narrative and it’s many forms, the more we will also come to know about the storied nature of the politics of personal experience” (R. Graham)

This project focuses on considering the usefulness of story, the role of digital image making and the role of critical reflection to pause and consider, How might personal stories and an awareness of our senses help deepen our understanding of the process of teaching and learning to become more compassionate human beings in the process? It investigates the role of attending to our everyday living as teachers situated in lives and histories that affect our defining of curriculum. How might we develop greater awareness of our senses?

I concentrate on digital photography as a means through which we can come to understand the world, because we must first visualize before we can imagine what is possible. Maxine Green (2008) writes, “Imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions. …I would like to claim that this is how learning happens and that the educative task is to create situations in which the young are moved to begin to ask, in all the tones of voice there are, “Why?” (p. 5-6).
Narrative inquiry is a research practice that was first used in educational research by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). It is based on the Deweyan (1938) notion of researching life as lived in education. That is, if we attend to our lived experiences, we can come to understand how our stories shape our lives and how we can learn to reshape our stories. How we think about an experience is the phenomenon of study. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) offer this definition: “To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study (P.477).

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research methodology that investigates our how we live our lives. Narrative inquiry has been used in many other fields such as anthropology (Bateson, 1994) and occupational therapy, but this study is focused on narrative inquiry’s role for improving teacher practice.

1.1 What Is Narrative Inquiry?

There are many forms of narrative inquiry, but this study focuses on the way we experience everyday living through how we construct visual narratives. It explores the question of the power of narrative and everyday lived experiences in research framework of Clandinin and Connelly (1990) and Maxine Greene (1995). Also an arts based approach of A/r/tography from Irwin (2000) are used. Eastern philosophies are also referenced.

Hermeneutics is the understanding of texts or concepts as they are read and considers how they are filtered through our contexts, histories and biases. It asks us to
consider how those understandings are interpreted and formed. Hermeneutics asks the question, “Where are we coming from?”

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) offered “three commonplaces of narrative inquiry, temporality, sociality and place - which specify dimensions of an inquiry space” (p.470). These common places were the framework used for this narrative inquiry:

- Temporality - considering the self-produced photo narrative process over time
- Sociality - looking at the self that teaches and the relationship with the subjects being photographed
- Place - the locations where the inquiries took place

Much educational research involving the use of photography to date has primarily focused on narrative writing with images supporting the written data. Some have used visual images primarily as the sources of data. The main approach taken here is arts based, A/r/tography, which Irwin (2004) describes as a way of inquiring in the world through making art and by writing. It is about living a life of inquiry, about the process of art making and the tensions between the resulting product and the audience, the artist and text, the personal and the public. It is not about illustrating an idea as a photo, but examining the experience while making photos and about the process of meaning making for opening new possibilities for our professional lives. Rita Irwin (2005) writes; “Living Inquiry refuses absolutes; rather, it engages with a continual process of not-knowing, of searching for meaning that is difficult and in tension.” (P. 902).

Chase (2005) writes that narrative researchers “treat narrative as a distinct form of discourse, as a way of understanding one’s own and others’ actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time” (p.66)
2 A/r/tography

A/r/tography (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004) is an arts based research methodology that allows for new understandings of what is meant by educational research. The slashes between a,r and t represent the hyphenated identities of artist-researcher-teacher. It is hoped that an investigation of the in between spaces are sites where each of the identities can inform the other to bring about a more holistic view of the self and what influences our teaching. These ideas of the “in dwelling” between spaces are attributed to Ted Aoki. In being an artist, researcher and teacher, I am traversing boundaries and living in marginal spaces. These spaces sometimes touch on social challenges or taboos.

The methodology of a/r/tography combined with self-study can be a way of examining our practice and how it is influenced by our beliefs and points of viewing. Pinnegar, (1998) suggests: “Self-study researchers seek to understand their practice settings. They observe their settings carefully, systematically collect data to represent and capture observations they are making, study research from other methodologies for insights into their current practice, thoughtfully consider their own background and contribution to this setting, and reflect on any combination of these avenues in their attempts to understand…For these reasons…self-study is not a collection of particular methods but instead a methodology for studying professional practice settings”. (p. 33)

Field note: Every photo I make has a multiplicity of meanings. They are constructed technically and socially. Is this art or social science?

As I began understanding more about the processes and techniques of photography, I came to realize the potential of image making for changing my views of the world around me. Photography can capture social constructions that the photographer is trying to preserve. By adding text to photos, it can also help the photographer to explore how they make meaning of the images they are capturing. It can also be an investigation into how the audience is reading or interpreting images as visual texts, or how these visual texts shape teacher identity, and lastly, how they may help others to understand my work and their own better.
Photography can be used to open up liminal spaces. Irwin writes; “In-between spaces are always attached to others yet they are neither inside nor outside. Liminal spaces are dynamic spaces of possibility where individuals and cultures encounter one another creating interstitial conditions for new communities of learning. For educators there is a need to understand what liminal practices might look like, how teachers may embody liminal practices and how liminal communities might be created.”

This paper considers whether visual images produced by digital photography can be used as the subject or as data for narrative inquiry. Some questions raised were: To what extent can visual images be used to construct narrative? What kinds of visual narratives provide data on experience? What is the relationship between images and accompanying text? How is the visual a different form of narrative and how can it be used to narrate? What is the relationship of everyday lived experiences with the understanding of the role of the researcher/teacher? How does narrative inquiry inform teaching?

In order to understand a visual image, we must also understand the theory that guides the taking of photographs, and understand how an image is read. How do people give meaning to images that they create in everyday life? We must also understand the history of the person reading the image and the impact that their knowledge and experiences have on the reading of the images. Bourdieu (1990) has researched the use of everyday snapshots and explains how these images are highly regulated and socially created. The social conventions of how we take pictures may be framed based on aesthetic principles and conventions of our culture and contexts. For example, only some social occasions are typically photographed such as birthdays and not funerals. Thus, we need to be aware that what is photographed is not necessarily a record of the events in a person’s life. Creating and viewing photographic imagery is a patterned social activity shaped by social contexts, cultural conventions and group norms.

Narrative inquiry was chosen to research educational experience because of the view that people are storytellers who lead storied lives (Bruner, 1986), and because narrative inquiry provides a holistic picture of an individual instead of one based on test scores or grades. Personal narratives are more than telling someone about oneself; (Ochberg, 1994) states they are the means by which identities may be defined in the sense that, in the telling of their stories, people come to terms with the conflicts in their lives, and because people's identities are based on their life stories (Rosenthal, 1997).
The telling of the stories is equally as important as the stories themselves, as it is in the ways stories are told, or the manner of the discourse, that gives understanding about the meaning of the stories told.

Currently in most schools in North America, education or knowledge is often framed in terms of achievement and outcomes based on standardized test scores. Chronological age is a benchmark by which children are measured with expectations of what they should know without consideration for the contexts of their lives. Many individuals have been trying to make schools more relevant for students today, but little will happen without a restructuring and reevaluation of the assessment system. An alternative might be to consider the contexts of students' lives, prior knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and different ways of knowing. Photography has become a common place for students to record the contexts of their lives. Good or bad, the photos that some post on social networking sites like Facebook, are telling of the increasing importance of photography for telling and sharing stories. How might the use of narrative inquiry in the classroom help students understand more about the importance of attending to the nature of the photos they take and the stories they tell?

We cannot make available the full range of human experience to everyone, but Greene (1995) maintains that it can be explored through arts based inquiry, and the role of the imagination is central to this. In efforts to find new possibilities for seeing and imagining a new curriculum, I have undertaken a visual approach to narrative inquiry. Investigating the use of digital photography combined with reflective writing to study the ways we describe; the beginning of a story, how photography can help capture the experience of living it, how an investigation into how we select or edit which photos or stories to tell or retell, can all have an impact on how we reshape our stories and biographical plot-lines over time.

I chose to take photos over the course of 5 years focusing on the themes of place, time, self and other. I was also interested to find out how technology advances have affected the types of images that can be created, and how these technological developments determine the sharing and reading of the images created.

Because it is becoming easier for more people to create and share digital images, more research methods are beginning to use images as part of the research work. It is the people, not the cameras that make a picture. What can we learn about the researcher by the images he or she makes? New methods of sharing and storing are
available which open up new possibilities for collaborative knowledge building as well as possibilities for visual archives. What affect will all of this have on our memories and sharing of experiences over time? How might the ease of sharing images affect the co-construction of meaning? Emerging photo editing technologies have also opened up new possibilities of recording different kinds of experiences previously not possible.

The field note reflections for this study were made with an intent to learn, not an intent to explain or come to a conclusion. Jordan and Margaret Paul (1983) wrote that communications in intimate relationships could be made with the intent to learn and the intent to protect. The intent to learn is what we can strive for, to listen with heart and explore something about others. The intent to protect is an aim to stay within or protect the boundaries of one’s own definitions, understandings and feelings. The intent to learn and the intent to protect are intertwined with our understandings of others as well as ourselves. Part of this inquiry is to become aware of my intent to protect and the reasons for it, to move towards a more genuine intent to learn.

Field note

I went back through old photos I had enlarged, as they were at some point deemed significant by the fact that I enlarged them. I noticed a pattern in the enlargements, with the theme of trees reoccurring. When I lay this image data down from oldest to most recent photos, early photos reminded of images I saw as a child in the Beautiful BC magazines my parents subscribed to. I wondered how much those magazines influenced the way I took images?

Memory takes me back to a visit to Disneyland. Scattered all over Disneyland were signs marking “Kodak picture perfect spot.” These were the places Kodak said children should stand and smile and have their picture taken by parents. I wonder how many other families have identical smiling pictures yet completely different experiences? Was it all that happy? I remember standing in line so long that I passed out from heat exhaustion. Was “It’s a Small World” really how we want to promote cross-cultural understanding? The ride has been changed today to be populated with cartoon characters from Disney movies and has a new American section with Hollywood bowl depicted. The son of the ride’s original designer, children’s illustrator Mary Blair, wrote of the addition of the Disney characters to the ride, “They will do nothing except marginalize the rightful stars of the ride, 'the children of the world.’” How do we marginalize others in the views we place in
front of our students in how we present curriculum? Why was it that I never was taught about what happened in first nations band schools, and instead only memorized the word portage?

The images of Banff National Park (below) reminded me of such Kodak picture perfect images, generic and non-thought provoking. What are these studies of trees good for? So I decided to trouble my portrayals of nature to see what liminal spaces I could open up for possibilities of seeing things a new. The following images are a result of that inquiry. I offer them without a conclusion, as my reviewing of them now opens up new ideas for me that images without words bring, an ever-changing reading of the images. How might we allow for new ways of approaching curriculum? Can technology, the arts, and imagination allow teachers to see new roles for themselves and new possibilities for how knowledge can be demonstrated?
3 The Place of the Researcher

3.1 Narrative Beginnings: The Place of the Researcher

Clandinin and Connelly (1990) suggest narrative inquiries should contain the following three elements; personal justification, practical justification and social justification or reasons why this narrative is important.

Personal justification: Photography is a passion I have pursued to fulfill my need to continually wonder about the world and how we view life. My thinking is changing and becoming evident in images I make today which are less constrained by social conventions. I am interested in opening up more ways for people to express themselves in the world of academia than through the expository essay.

Practically, I justify my inquiry through my interest in promoting arts based inquiry. Photography can be seen as an opening to ways of knowing and new forms of education that “digital natives” today can relate to. Narrative inquiry through photography is highly accessible to teachers and students today with the proliferation of cameras available in people’s back pockets. Video cameras, and cell phones offer new tools for reflective practice. The telling and retelling of stories can offer teachers better understandings of the contexts of their students, and possibilities for better assessment. Student e-portfolios are now becoming portals to a window on their digital lives.

Lastly, the social justification for engaging in narrative inquiry is that I believe understanding who we are and why we are here is a life pursuit. Sadly, education has often been delivered as set curriculum fed to students at times determined by chronological ages, irrespective of individual learning styles or abilities. We need to get educators out of conditioned patterns of behavior and role model teaching and learning from authentic places, as Coffey (1999) asserts self-study is a way of establishing authenticity. This involves teachers being in touch with their inner selves. This inner work involves personal transformation by attending to lived experiences.

Schools today, for the most part, pump massive amounts of information into students and create so many demands on them that they are distanced from what is
happening within their own minds, bodies, and spirits. They are so used to being fed information that many do not know what to do next after graduation, as they were not given enough opportunities to understand how to learn and pursue their own inquiries.

Education should prepare students to live well, be able to adapt to changing environments, and to understand how to pursue meaningful questions. To do so, students need to be able to think in creative ways and break out of conditioned patterns of perceptions and actions.

I propose that narrative inquiry may be a way of achieving the connection to our inner experiences. In particular, I draw on Buddhist and Eastern philosophical traditions of connecting with the awakened consciousness of living inquiry in my field notes.

3.2 Self-portraits: Field Notes

In my opinion, no one can claim to have truly seen something until he has photographed it.

(Emile Zola as quoted in Sontag, 1980, p. 86)

The images that I am making or the narratives that I am creating challenge the ‘I’ that I am and want to become. Janet Winterston wrote: “True art challenges the I that we are.”

I explored the notion of self-referential photography whereby the pictures refer to themselves inside and not outside of the picture frame.

I chose 2 methods of abstracting the referent or the image-maker from the photo. The first “death” of the referent can be seen in the negation of self in a self-portrait in a metacognitive sense. The title “this is no longer a self-portrait” refers to the destruction of the referent through the process of photo manipulation. The image of the self is pulled apart and recombined with another image of trails of smoke superimposed on top of another image of a flower. It represents how I see myself at SFU. I feel pulled apart and distorted. Sent into a whirl wind of smoke in the process of trying to write this paper in a style that I have not learned in which to write. I am painfully aware that I have no career as an academic writer, but know that I excel in my area of teaching and helping others to learn in a university setting. How can other forms of writing and self-expression be used to help others, like myself, to move through higher education settings and continue our love of learning?
Placing and photographing the camera in the picture make the second “death” of a referent.

The activity made me think about all the selves that we bring to teaching and why we need to make ourselves more fully self-aware of the self who teaches. I am extremely comfortable and confident working with technology and a camera. Enrolling in two writing courses has helped me to understand the need to learn to improve my writing and see possibilities for other forms of writing that I might be able to pursue such as poetry or film making. Photo: (right) “Double exposed” A self-conscious self-portrait. Julia Leong and Wayne Hoerchel, 2009.
4 Participants: The Self that Teaches

Inquiry is not so much thinking about answers, although the questions will produce a lot of thoughts that look like answers. It really involves just listening to the thinking that your questioning evokes, as if you were sitting by the side of the stream of your own thoughts, listening to the water flow over and around the rock, listening, listening, and watching an occasional leaf or twig as it is carried along. (Leo Praesen 1994)

Brooksfield (1995) writes, “We teach who we are,” therefore the “participants” in this study are defined as the images generated by the self. That is, I begin by looking at Who is the ‘I’ that teaches?

While there are many methods for conducting photo related research, such as photo elicitation, whereby a photo is used to elicit a response from a viewer and that response is used for the data. I have chosen instead to focus mainly on self-generated photos as a form of self-study. The approach of looking at self-produced photographs as the subject of self-study, photo-biography, was pioneered by Ziller (1990), in psychology. In photo-biography, the researcher is also the subject who uses the camera to explore questions of identity.

A Canadian born Chinese woman, I am also; a teacher, photographer, outdoor enthusiast, artist, designer, large dog and dark chocolate affezionato with added identities complements of Twitter and Facebook. My identity is multiple and ever forming.

I have also chosen to consider photos that are made in every day circumstances as I believe that it is important to understand who we are and analyze what we do on a regular daily routine. This informs us about ourselves and how we move through daily living. The “data,” are “everyday” photos that I have produced, as a form of wondering. I want to qualify the use of the term “everyday” photography as the images that I have created as a kind of ‘amateur’ photography. They are not images documenting my daily life activities, but of the experiences I have been drawn to photograph as a part of my living inquiry. I have engaged in studying how photographic techniques can be used to
more fully convey experiences and open up liminal spaces for us to redefine what was once held tightly.

I am also seeing the connection between the technical value of production and the link it can have to the consumption of the images. For example, I have been learning more about the technical aspects of image making and postproduction. How I choose to share those images, affects my production decisions. Some are records of events stored on hard drives, some made into hard copy photo albums for family members, some made for remixing and digitally shared on sites like www.flickr.com. Where they are viewed and production techniques affect the photo’s currency.

The data I am using also extends beyond the “everyday snapshot.” I have set out to take photos with a point of departure, or an awareness of setting out to make an image with a desired “new take” or departure from old ways of seeing. That is, the reason to take photographs is not driven by the social need for photographs. Bourdieu (1990) argues that the photos create memories or narratives that are reflected upon, but are constrained by social boundaries. We take photos in social situations and follow certain social conventions of western culture. There are certain themes and contexts, which are more socially accepted as places where everyday photos can be made. These are not usually photos of everyday existence.

Instead, I am allowing my camera to lead me, as a lamp to the heart, to help me to see what it is I am drawn to. These photographs are taken to conform or challenge conventions of photography and are used to arrive at an understanding of the making of myself, the photographer. There exists a tension within the researcher themselves when one sets about on a self-study narrative inquiry. Initially, I was uncomfortable about where the process of self-study might push me to reflect. What boundaries might I have to consider? The boundaries are those that I have myself created by my own thinking.

Harrison (1990) points out, “Thus the social functions that allow photographs to exist defines their limits. So while everything is objectively photographable the amateur production of pictures draws on a well-defined, common range of subjects, as well as shared compositional structures or genres.” (p. 101).

Photographs easily serve as a basis for dialog with others. Harrison (2002) writes; “Asking respondents to interpret images of themselves and/or others elicits processes of ‘making sense’ of meanings assigned. It is not necessary for images to be
self-generated for visual materials to be read as texts“ (p. 102). Creating self-generated visuals is a way for the creator to “speak” about their experience without words and can provide windows into perceptions and invites others into conversations of the experience. The photos can be a way of understanding experiences that are mostly visual and best conveyed through images rather than texts.

Thoutenhoff (1998) also argues for the value of photos without accompanying texts. A study by Thoutenhoff (1998) involved giving cameras to deaf people to have them record their experiences as it “hinges on an ability to literally see it’s phenomena, we should be willing to bracket (or abandon altogether) verbally-based, or rather, literacy dependent research methods in favour of other forms of inquiry.” (P.8)

Some photos are attached both with and without text as part of my field data and inquiry into how accompanying text affects their reading. I found that in moving my subjects further towards an abstraction of objects, it could allow for more possibilities of points of intersection in our dialog, but it could also move to the point of disconnect for some who may be used seeing images that conform to more ‘typical’ north American themes of family, holidays, scenery for example.
How much impact does the media landscape around us have on us, our relationships and our learning? Do you see this as an image of a hero or a villain?
Cherry Cola fit for royalty.
Chemistry concoction consumed
to create a cacophony.

Why do some teachers mark with a red pen?

Photos: Julia Leong 2011
Photos Julia Leong 2011
5 Why Digital Photography for Narrative Inquiry?

How do I know what I think until I see what I say? (E.M. Forrester)

While there have been many studies (McKinnon, Mitchell & Webber, 1999, Harris & Pinnegar, 2000), that investigate the use of video in scrutinizing a teacher’s act of teaching in the classroom, the act of being filmed can have an impact on one’s actions and is still only a partial representation of one’s practice. It is based on what the camera operator was viewing and the angle of the camera to record a particular event visible at that angle and time. This can provide dissonance and another view of one’s self. I chose instead to investigate how we view ourselves through an examination of the images that we make. This use of digital images is an effort to capture and make available for reflection, actions ‘in the moment’. It allows us to re/view moments and take time to reflect on the meaning making involved in capturing the images. These ‘slowed down’ looks can also provide opportunities to look back at the immediate experience and the total experience. The distance of time between the recording of the event and the reflection time beg the question, am I photographing what I see or am I seeing what I photograph?

Loughran and Russell, (1997) argued that we need to “meet students on their own terms” by valuing their ideas and challenging teachers to “interpret their own meaning in ways that they have not had to before and to translate insights into future teaching. Sharing personal photos with others in education invites them into the conversation to identify shared experiences and help make sense of the knowledge gained in the process. Having teachers undergo the experience of creating visual narratives or multimedia could help them to better understand their student’s digital culture and need for students to create and share their work with others as they do on Facebook.

If we try to engage students in the creation of multi-media, we can help them gain an understanding of the impact of mass media on our lives. We can also better understand the media rich contexts which students today are living in. Heaton and Lampert (1993) argue that in order to teach teachers about teaching for understanding,
they need to interact in the context of the same teaching problems to understand how they arise. Can this help bridge the digital divide and focus students on personal identity formation in an age of media bombardment?

Jon Kabat-Zinn (1994) writes: “The spirit of inquiry is fundamental to living mindfully. Inquiry is not just a way to solve problems in the way to make sure you were staying in touch with the basic mystery of life itself and of our presence here…. Inquiry doesn’t mean looking for answers, especially quick answers which come out of superficial thinking. It means asking without expecting answers, just pondering the questions, carrying the wondering with you, letting it percolate, bubble, cook, ripen, come in and out of awareness, just as everything else comes in and out of awareness. Inquiry is not so much thinking about answers, although the questions will produce a lot of thoughts that look like answers. It really involves just listening to the thinking that your questioning evokes, as if you were sitting by the side of the stream of your own thoughts, listening to the water flow over and around the rock, listening, listening, and watching an occasional leaf or twig as it is carried along.”

Creating photos is an important part of the process, as Dewey talks about experience precedes learning, but in order to confront contradictions, Brooksfield (1995) argues we need to be in a process of constant critical reflection. So the creation of field notes made while creating the photos, and ‘polished notes’ made later are part of the process of “bending back on our assumptions” to see if there are new ways of re/telling our narratives. The purpose of retelling sections of our narratives is to offer new possibilities for new ways of seeing and doing things.

So I start with the act of doing by creating photos because “Nothing I would tell you could be copied and used. It could be experimented around, but to experiment you would have to look at/experience the art and, if you so choose, imitate and alter, find out about its workings by trying to do it. Nothing I can say, so I think, can lead you toward that understanding, which will only flow from your doing” (Blumenfeld-Jones, 2002, p. 90).

As Blumenfeld-Jones (2002) and Loughand (2008) write, experience precedes understanding. We need to do things to aid our understandings. Photographing familiar subjects and exploring how we can offer new ways of viewing them can allow us to be mindful, reflexive, and self-conscious of our aesthetic and narrative forms of
representation. My photos could open up for example, possibilities for more feminist points of viewing, or a cross cultural interpretation of subjects.

Visual and arts based research methods can be used to re/present and re/interpret one’s self-study research not only for the reflective opportunities, but also for the social and cultural aspects of personal experience that they make us consider in the image creation process.

Narrative inquiry allows us to study our life experiences. We are storied people, living storied lives. We understand the world and relate it to others through stories. Thus, it makes sense to study life experience narratively. This research is about trying to reflect on personal life experiences and trying to make sense of life as lived. Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it.
Field Note

As a hybrid, standing between two cultures, these images are autobiographical in their representation of how I intended you to read them, top to bottom, like Chinese characters.

Red, symbolic cultural meanings: fortune, love, blood, life, anger, STOP. What context affected your reading of these images? Like Rorschach blotches, will you read this photo spelled forth from my mind as it tendrils out. Will it be the same today, tomorrow, or can we ever stop this parade of time?

Bounce

Why does this read any differently from the visual narrative above?
photos by Wayne Hoerchel and Julia Leong 2009
6 Research Design – Living Inquiry

I have taken a Living inquiry approach from Karen Meyer (2010), who writes; “Living Inquiry is a practice of inquiry into being-in-the-world. It concerns care of oneself in the world…we are opened up to what is questionable in the world, to what normally goes unnoticed” (p.86 ). Together with Karen Meyer and other graduate students at UBC, we investigated four themes: Place, language, time, self/other. We investigated place because “Attention to place grounds us by heightening our senses to both physical and social textures that surround us. Place is where we go, where we find ourselves, and where we live. We looked at language because it is how we convey ourselves. Time had us investigate our past, present and future and the relationship of temporality in investigating daily living. Self and other was an investigation into as Kurshnamurti (1963) says, “observing the observer” and looking at how we interact with and observe others.

I took photos from everyday living for nearly six years as a form of action research. Since action research starts with everyday experience and is concerned with the development of living knowledge, the process of inquiry was as important as the resulting images.

I kept field notes while in the process of making photos, or what Schon refers to as “reflection in action.” Later I would return to these field notes to make more polished notes as a form of narrative life writing, or Living Inquiry. I shared them with other educators in my graduate class. As we shared our field notes, following the practice of critical reflection that Brooksfield (1995) suggests, we viewed our own practice through multiple lenses; autobiographical writing (photo-biography), student perspectives, colleague perceptions, and theory. New inquiries emerged from questions and introspections of others when viewed through their diverse cultures, backgrounds, and histories. Physically being able to see our points of view from a camera helped us to bring into critical view, habitual ways of seeing. Would the teaching of visual literacy allow for teaching practices that could be more democratic, or should the five paragraph essay reign supreme?
Through this living inquiry study I was challenged to rethink my curriculum to allow its content to be more about life itself. Heidegger (1927) argued that the question of human existence is central to the pursuit of the question of being. Heidegger, believed that experience is situated in worldliness and in ways of being. That is, the meaning of something depends upon the context in which we encounter it. We have been formed by our culture, history, and experiences. Attending to how we live and conduct our lives has us reflect upon what we want to coincide, or not, with this self that we are narrating.

One of the core principles that I have come to believe in is the importance of living inquiry and self-study as an opportunity for personal growth and as a possibility for re-imagining a more democratic curriculum. I have tried to enact these principles by creating distinctive opportunities for teachers in the leadership classes I work with to investigate themselves and their practice to consider points of tension and power in schools. Principals and teachers were asked to photograph their desks and to write field notes about what they were thinking in the process, and what the resulting image represented. It has been stated that the distance between what we feel and see can provide possibilities for reflecting on alternative possibilities for action (Mitchell and Webber, 1999). Can a viewing of something like the our desk show us something about our pedagogical beliefs?

I do not separate my teaching from my life. To me it is a quest into life, an inquiry into how to develop pedagogy of teaching that creates meaning for myself and those I teach. It is an inquiry into our daily living. I realize that I am witnessing a moment of “natality” (Arendt, 1958).

Field note

What are the multiple meanings situated on this surface? Do you view this ink as the record of a young man bored and rebelling against society or do you see these as beautiful art, statements of a life wealthy with curiosities? There are multiple messages on the surface of his skin, just as there are with the growing lines on my yellowing skin. What are the spaces these marks create? What is the purpose of the marks teachers give students? Do they mark a child or allow them to know themselves better?

Carl Leggo asks us, “Not if this is good, but what is it good for?” For me, this photo is good for is putting forth an education of connections and questions.
6.1 Language

The first theme of living inquiry explored was language. Language is the medium through which we become intelligible. Focusing on the discourse or nature of how we how we communicate with written texts have been a focus in my narrative inquiry. From Carl Leggo, I am learning to “live poetically” and learning to write my life through positive stories. I always liked stories with happy endings but have now discovered that my life doesn’t have to follow the plot line of a Disney character.

The theme of language is explored through photographic techniques. Shutter speed and the size of the aperture are the basic determinants of the amount of light that gets recorded. We can communicate with light, paint with light, bring things to new light, or uncover that which has been in darkness. I am learning to see things from new points of viewing and I am trying to develop my courses in such a way as to allow the participants to inquire and discover for themselves, how to expand their conceptions of what teaching and learning can be in an age of technology. Hanna Arendt points out, “The role of pedagogy is to introduce students as newcomers to the world as it is, not just as we see it.” How does our current system resist reflective practice?

In my inquiry through photography, I am attending to what draws my attention from the context as an educator. Approaching each image with wonder means that I
don’t have a predetermined image in my mind that I am attempting to cage or reproduce. Trying to approach each image as an inquiry into how this experience can be seen new each time of day, each season, through each angle, seen by each audience and each format for making the image available to view. I photograph not to present truth or answers, but to listen for ways this experience may evoke wonder for myself and others. As an educator, are we preparing students for wonder?

Field note: New voices discovered in poetic language
I discovered a voice I never knew I had nor really understood the power of when I enrolled in a poetry writing class with Dr. Carl Leggo. This was something completely out of my comfort zone and I was forced to confront this fear when I learned that we had to stand up and share aloud the poems that we wrote! Of all the courses that I took in my graduate coursework, this has been the one that has had an impact on me and stretched me the most.

Language mediates a sense of place and belonging. Belonging cannot happen without language. Yet, language always is insufficient. These photos are experiences recorded and presented as an offering of an embodied moment.
An experience of living in liminal spaces.
6.2 Self/Other

Next we explored the theme of self and other. Below is a link to the global collaborative Paint with Light Project.

http://studentcreative.spruz.com/

This project was a collaboration of teachers and students from four countries who were given the challenge of showing their community from a magical new light. I chose to work with IDEAS36, a Surrey high school leadership program. The students were from an area of Surrey, BC, called Whalley which has had a poor reputation for being an area of crime and gang related problems.

The students were unhappy with the way many people view Whalley and viewed all inhabitants of this community in the same way. They decided that they wanted to paint Whalley in a different light. The created videos and photos of Whalley
photographed at night illuminated by their hope and creativity of what could be possible to see the city in a new light. They shared their projects to a global audience and created a book with other students who also wanted to paint their world in a different light.

Painting with light was a way of approaching the subject of reference points and invited viewers to view the resulting photos without an initial point of reference. This project was a way of teaching students to make photos that don’t just replicate or imitate what we have already come to know? Making images of things that are not abstract but are an abstraction of an object, an abstraction of something concrete we already know. Looking at photography in this way helps us to recognize the process of image making, juxtaposing, repositioning and cropping creates tensions in the aims of creating for the purposes of art and for re-imagining new ways of having students view themselves and their surroundings.

Field note

During my studies, I wanted to learn to be more technically proficient at image making so I participated in several photography classes. For two years of that time, I was also traveling often to work with teachers abroad to show them how to integrate technology into their practice. It would be dark by the time I was able to go outside to explore the city I was visiting. This made me interested in viewing cities by night and making images in the dark, by painting with light.

Painting with light is photographic technique where by a camera is set with a long shutter exposure on a tripod. While the shutter was open, participants could use glow sticks, or flash lights to paint into the darkness or illuminate objects and their surroundings. I shared the idea with teachers and it sparked many uses for photography such as; for drawing self-portraits of our multiple selves, graffiti writing with light, and literally re-imagining people, places and things in a new “better” light. This in turn sparked a new idea for a student world collaborative project.
“Ambiguity is the warp of life, not something to be eliminated” (p.9).
Mary Kathern Bateson

For Bateson, certainty is not a goal. The images I create are not the goal but the route to the resulting image, to what I am saying is. I am creating images to learn about the practice of seeing. Seeing life using Geertz’s (1995) metaphor of a parade that is moving by in front of me. This inquiry is about seeing a tentativeness of photography first by how it relates to how our perspectives are always moving in a parade. We see things in one way and understand it as so because of how we are positioned in the parade. If we change our position, our way of knowing changes. Second, our knowing is tentative because as the parade moves past us, our relative position changes. What we saw as it approached us changes in time as it moves past us.
What can time reveal? Re/storying-in viewing your “self-history” or autobiographical photos, considers what is missing. What was left out of the picture? What pictures were not taken but could have been?

Long exposure photography for me became a process of mindful inquiry both in meditating while taking long time exposure photos and in reflecting upon the resulting images. The process engaged me in contemplative processes shared by some Buddhist beliefs such as:

1. How important mindfulness is
2. Developing the ability to see from multiple points of view
3. Focuses on alleviating suffering
4. Trying to clear or open the mind to reveal underlying awareness
Another element of long exposure photography I was inquiring into was the technical ability of the photographer to use the camera, like a paint brush, to convey experiences. Through advances in technology, combined with my increased understanding of photographic techniques, I was able capture an essence of temporality. I achieved this with neutral density filters, combined with long shutter exposures.

Field note: Stanley Park Balancing Rocks The discovery of long exposure photography was like an invitation to a new style of writing. It allowed me to record an extended period of time on one frame. The process involves the use of neutral density filters made of black glass. They block sunlight thereby allowing the photographer to increase the time that the shutter is open without over exposing the image. When the camera is placed on a tripod, anything that is moving such as clouds,
or the ocean, or people, become blurred into ghostly shadows or even disappear entirely, depending on the length of the exposure and how fast the objects are moving.

What this allowed me to do was take photos on crowded beaches and in effect have the tourists erase themselves by rushing along in front of the camera. What I was left with was the essence of my experience of being face to face with the sea and not noticing people as part of the narrative of that experience. The technique distills the message down to an essence. The process becomes one of finding the question to be recorded. What is the experience of being by the sea?

My breathing becomes one with the roll of the waves.

For me, long exposure is about embracing ambiguity. Like teaching and learning, certainty is not the goal. Creating long exposures provided a pause in time, to sit and wonder. The process itself is a reflective one or waiting and finding the question. Each exposure can take ten minutes or more, so I would have time to question, to study my subject being photographed and to watch myself and observe how time passes through me.

I would not know how each resulting image would turn out until after ten minutes. This process was disruptive in not with having a fixed position as a goal. The process of staying open, like the shutter, and waiting to see what the results could be helped me to see the parallel of offering a new curriculum. A curriculum where the student comes to it with his or her own inquiry and the outcome is not to necessarily come out with one right answer but to understand how one forms questions and looks for opportunities to learn in unusual places.

The resulting images were usually void of people, as their movements made them invisible during such long time exposures. I enjoyed this result but it elicited a response of loneliness to some, peacefulness to others, and eeriness to others by the absence of human subjects. I enjoyed the aesthetic that there were no people in the photo as it allowed me to escape the awkwardness of taking photos of strangers. I wondered what this said about me as a teacher whose effectiveness depends on making others look good, but who’s aesthetic preference is to make universal images void of people? This research is about the “I” of the inquirer and the eye of the researcher, and recognizing that both see biases.
The subject of my inquiries are also my photos. Photos that invite you in to wonder about the story, or that invite the viewer to engage in creating a narrative upon viewing the image. I think this is why I enjoyed making photos with no people in them. It’s easier to imagine yourself there.

What is your response to this image? What version of the narrative came before my introduction to long exposure photography? My personal and academic life was built from my urban upbringing, western living, and multicultural surroundings. In what way does this lived experience text help to understand the pedagogy of the researcher?

Photo: Stanley Park, Vancouver. Julia Leong 2011

Photo: Ogden Point, Victoria. Julia Leong, Wayne Höecherl 2010
Usually I make long exposure photos alone, as it is a long and slow process to create each photo. This has allowed me to be more in touch with the grounding of place. Arriving, I become aware of how much I feel like an intruder. Creating long exposure photos allows me to dwell more deeply introspectively and to study the place I am at. What stops me from being more present in a place initially is the feeling of being an intruder, of not belonging. I notice the sea animals noticing me noticing them. After setting up and sitting with the shutter left open for ten minutes, the birds and seals no longer see me and I attend to more distant shores. Is this what is meant by being at one with a place? When I myself become invisible and don’t notice myself being there. Once I arrived at this state, I was able to attend to the feeling of wanting to study it, wonder about it, try to be it, and capture it. That is when I become attached and want to share it. Things become silent and still. That is when emptiness appears as an invisible divider between being in the moment and allowing thoughts about the past or future to creep in. My thoughts stray to what I have to do when I return home. Why do I feel displaced when I’m not “doing?” I figure out the next vantage point and move my tripod to an alternate point of viewing. How and what I attend to is changing. I will try again.

Kurshnamurti (1969) writes about freeing ourselves from the known, or letting go of previous moments so that we don’t become attached to the idea of permanence. It is this attachment or holding on to pleasures of the past are what causes us to miss the present moments, as they appear, and brings us pain in trying to maintain them. Sitting, waiting on the beach gives me an awareness of the tension in my body and the racing pace of my thoughts and actions. After about 20 minutes of waiting, I begin to feel myself bringing things into focus. The details of my surroundings are pulled into view. The
people passing by fade out of my consciousness. Waves turn into one piece of music. I sit with my eyes closed emulating the wave’s motions with my breath. Birds now come into my awareness. Rocks rolling back with the receding waves are brought to my attention. I watch a woman and her dogs engage in simple pleasures of sticks being tossed into the sea. My friend has just stepped into the frame and is posing for me. I chuckle as he knows that his image will not appear in this time exposure so I leave my camera’s side and walk down to be by his side. He has shown me what it means to be there even if you’d rather be somewhere else.

Moments of time seem so different by the sea. Endings marked by the setting of the sun. I wonder why this experience of time and contemplative state has escaped my urban life? I wonder about the state teachers are often in as they rush from class to class, feeling there isn’t enough time to teach all there is to learn this year. I wonder how teachers differentiate knowledge and information? I wonder if in my educational technology course, I could begin with allowing teachers to be in an experience that lets them understand how they are being in the world, and what types of thoughts are blocking them from seeing how teaching and learning can be different. I wonder what would happen if I started the first day of a class by saying; “there are some people in the group that need help, find them and figure out what to do?”
7 Types of Narrative Thinking: Grand Narrative versus Narrative Thinking

Bloom’s taxonomy was written in 1956. It is considered as one of the significant writings that have influenced curriculum. Thus Blooms Taxonomy is central to educational thought. It is a “grand narrative”

If curriculum is defined by a “grand narrative” notion whereby, curriculum is taught by the teacher, certain outcomes are achieved and the measure of student outcomes is seen as a measure of teacher success. In contrast, a narrative view sees the teacher as a part of the curriculum, not a variable. The teacher teaches as a function of who the teacher is. That is, the teacher is a part of the goal setting and the curriculum and the outcomes achieved.

What we construct as curriculum is an expression of our narrative histories. How students perform is a result that needs to be understood in the context of their narrative histories. Knowing their background or narrative history can, for example, help us to understand assessment results and what authentic demonstrations of learning might look like for different students.
8 Time/Temporality

Now will never be now again.

Linking notions of the grand narrative to the theme of temporality, the grand narrative does not take into account the notion of time. It sees an object as frozen in time and isolated from the individuality of the context.

The ocean has meaning for all of us. A long exposure photo to me has a past, present and future. It is an expression of something happening over time and not as a single moment. Leaving the shutter open for long periods of time is a way of reestablishing perception and creating disorientations within the grand narratives we all know. When the sea becomes a blur and the washing of time with each wave is swallowed into one, some mysterious voice beacons within me and I cannot resist being drawn in. What I am trying to achieve is something both individual and universal in the reading of the ocean.

Photo: Long Exposure, Malibu, CA. Julia Leong 2011

This series of images was cropped and reduced to black and white to help it reach its potential and my final expression. Is it a timeless gesture of a moment when I ponder the meaning of life by the seaside. The images are void of people or figures are rendered invisible by the long time exposure.
The tension is between seeing things as they are and seeing them over time. In the same way, there is a tension in teaching between learning objectives and how we frame our understanding of those objectives in time. A narrative perspective puts the objectives into a context of time. They have different meaning if we consider the stories behind each learner and each teacher’s history. If we consider their learning histories, we will come to different understandings of their achievement scores or growth in learning.

In the grand narrative perspective, a learning objective is seen as something that is achieved at a certain age, and a certain level of thinking that is reached. The context of individual learners is not regarded in the grand narrative understanding of objective. Narrative knowing puts us in touch with an understanding of who the learner was.

John Dewey has greatly influenced my philosophy of education in his writings about the importance of experience. His theory states that the experiences a person has influences their future. A person’s experience will depend on what happened in between their previous and his or her past. It is necessary for the teacher to have an understanding of the students’ past history to effectively design a sequence of educational experiences to allow them to access future opportunities for growth. By linking experience with inquiry, we can simultaneously think about the past, present, and future if we think of experience as Dewey defined it. Experiences grow out of other experiences. That is, there is continuity, that each of our experiences are shaped by past experiences and those influence future ones. If we take time to reflect on our experiences, and consider how we can reshape future ones we can enable students to become more productive in society.

Looking over the thousands of photos I have made over the course of this project, themes and patterns emerge. I am moving towards abstractions and black and white photography in my recent work. Early work was a form of record keeping, like pins on a map of where I’d been and who were my journey partners. Now I am learning to look at what are the essences of a subject that need to be told? What are the new experiences I wish to bring forward from this into my classroom?

Maxine Greene (2005) writes about “seeing big” like from the viewpoint of a principal who needs to see the big picture from multiple points of view, to “seeing small” and zooming in on something to get more details and understand it differently. What might “seeing things small” by looking through teacher stories help administrators bring
them into their peripheral vision? What might professional development look like if
details and stories from kids and teachers became the focus of development for
professional development if kids had a say in this decision making?
9 **Place: Home**

Karen Meyer (2010) reminds us that one of the reasons for the practice of living inquiry is because our pedagogy is inextricably intertwined with our daily living. That “Everything that we come in contact with turns immediately into a condition of our existence.”

Paying attention to place, what grounds and heightens awareness of where we come from and what constitutes home. Place is both a physical space and a socially defined one. We feel at home in certain places because of what society has made us believe is or isn’t an appropriate place. We live in glass boxes but yearn to be outside. We build paved streets but love the feel of warm sand beneath our feet. Inquiring into place at first seemed like an easy task. What is the place that I call home? What am I doing here and what is the connection between the places where I feel most at home and what does that say about my worldliness? What are the things in my sense of place that I routinely use and have associations with and are disconnected from? What is it about a home that gives us a sense of permanence and belonging? Why do I feel so at home in the mountains or when breathing in rhythm next to the sea? Do others in my place I feel at ‘home’?

I think about my home and reasons why I am attached to it. How does where we are help to make us who we are? Staring outside my office window into the forest, like I’m living in a glass box, feeling from the inside that I am simultaneously outside. Aware that here I am not longing to be elsewhere out there. I am aware that what brought me to this place was the sense of light and the feeling that envelopes this home. Visitors entering the house have commented on the sense of balance of the building and the surroundings they feel. In Chinese culture we refer to this as Fen Shui, an ancient Chinese system of designing buildings and space according to special rules about the flow of energy, to achieve harmony with the environment. I wished more new schools were designed with attention to the impact of space on learning. If we don’t have funding to reshape physical learning spaces, perhaps we can re-envision what we refer to as places where learning can take place. Even the ways we word things can create a place for people to be/long. For example, if I state that I am Canadian, people will often ask for
clarification. They are usually satisfied if I state that I am a Canadian born Chinese. How is that different from being a Chinese Canadian? Language can dis/place.

The subject of place was also considered through technology. Technology is shaping definitions of personal learning spaces as people can now learn anywhere, at any time, from anyone. The possibilities of how school, as a ‘place’ of learning, is going to be redefined by technology. I have learned more in the past few years from people on line around the world, than I have in a school institution. I am changing my views on curriculum and am finding merit in allowing students to find and follow their own questions and passions rather than having textbooks and set curriculum only dictate their learning. Malcolm Gladwell (2009) speaks of the 10,000 hours that it takes to develop a level of mastery or expertise in a subject area. I would be curious to follow up on Kieran Egan’s (2010) study of having students choose a personal interest project and be allowed to pursue self-directed study it from grade 3 until grade 12 alongside their regular set curriculum.

Field note

In my home I don’t have cable TV.
My closest friends reject TV like me.
I don’t want media messages telling me
How to buy mass-produced clothes for individuality.
How thin we should be, or the formula to be glad
Oh, March 25th, 5pm, release time.
Gotta get in line
for a new iPad.

I am learning the importance of getting to know the contexts of the lives of participants in my educational technology class. I often have them form base line portfolios to show a snapshot of where they are at so that they can put their learning in a context and focus on the growth in new learning achieved and not a measure of the products they can produce with technology.

“I am however left with the question, what is living inquiry? It is not a philosophy of life, a methodology to be followed, or an analytical how to live with the quality of awareness that sees newness, truth, and beauty in daily Life.” (Meyer, 2006, p. 165)

What are the dualities of place and of my mind? What is it about having a home? Why do we strive for this idea of permanence when we know that our time here is short? I am ready to let go of this
place called home. Must I move to let go? There are many forces tugging at my attention.

Field note:
Sitting at my window looking out at the forest, like an observer behind a duck blind. An eagle is circling. Perhaps the same one I have seen over the years chased by crows, building a nest, and perhaps the same one dropping a salmon on my roof. I have grown accustomed to eagle being in this place as part of the community. Am I still watching eagle in the same wonder as when I first noticed him? I am learning what it means to see him anew. I am different now than when we first met. Only now I am not just observing him. I am learning how our lives are all entangled and that each of our actions affects others around us. Krishnamurti’s words lend some insight:

So if you can look at all things without allowing pleasure to creep in—at a face, a bird, the colour of a sari, the beauty of a sheet of water shimmering in the sun, or anything that gives delight—if you can look at it without wanting the experience to be repeated, then there will be no pain, no fear, and therefore tremendous joy. It is the struggle to repeat and perpetuate pleasure, which turns it into pain. Watch it in yourself. The very demand for the repetition of pleasure causes pain, because it is not the same as it was yesterday. You struggle to achieve the same delight, not only to your aesthetic sense but the same inward quality of the mind, and you are hurt and disappointed because it is denied to you.” (p. 37)

Many such as Collier and Collier (1986) have used photo-elicitation as a methodology for research, where by photos are used in conjunction with interviews and writing of the subjects being photographed as part of the research process, Heisly (2001), argues that visual methodologies can be used without interview texts accompanying them. Pinney (1992) states that some “photography appears as the final culmination of a Western quest for visibility and scrutiny” (p. 74). In other words, Pinney (1992) is saying that a researcher can be presented through the photos that he or she makes. Ralph Gibson (March 2011 interview) asks, “Are we seeing the photograph, or are we photographing what we see?”

Field note

Making images of architecture is appealing to me because they break the rules or conventions of photography. I take photos to find something out. To learn something about the subject or the experience or the essence of a feeling that I didn’t know before I took the photo. It involves the photographer, the object and the audience in the process of the photographer making technical decisions, the audience looking at the image and reflecting on it’s essence or the response it evokes, and study of the object itself. It is not the truth but is a version of the truth, a moment in time. What words does this image convey?
Alex de Cosson wrote about “a (S)p(l)ace of finding.” The splicing of the word place and the introduction of the letter “S” was like a spliced interlocking of multiple meanings. Looking at both the place and displacement of space of a teacher trying to understand themselves as artist, researcher, and teacher in praxis. Understanding myself as a photographer makes me aware of my lack of understanding in areas such as Math or Science. So I looked into improving my learning through numbers with a computational program called Wolfram alpha. It will compute and show you the workings for nearly any type of computational problem. It left me feeling empowered that technology could help me with complex math computations. More importantly, it left me with the question, “What should learning look like in an age of computers?” Learning could be focused on problem finding in an age of computing. So much time doesn’t need to be given to teaching students how to hand calculate long mathematical formulas. Computers today can calculate numbers better and faster than we can so why is it so difficult to change the nature of the questions that students are often asked to solve in Math classes?
10 Why Autobiographical Writing?

Max van Mannen, (1988) provides accounts of how research was conducted through personal reflections of participating, analyzing and writing about lived experiences.

Atkinson and Silverman (1997) state that self-study has an important role in serving as a confessional, a way to “reveal and restore the self” (P. 313). They write;

“The narrative is therapeutic not only for the teller but also for the audience(s). Viewing, hearing, or reading a confessional interview invites complicity with the penetration of the private self. The dramaturgy of revelation and (auto)biographical narration affirms the interiority of the self (p.313).

Autobiographical writing can reflect self-revelation, confession and emphasize the subjectivity of lived experience.

All ethnographic work is partially autobiographical. Sometimes my photos are seen as records, or data, and other times they are a record of ‘me.’

Field note

We define ourselves in the process of revealing ourselves and living a life embodied by our contexts. I want to know how being a photographer influences my pedagogy.

Procedure: A/ritography

Do you see what I mean?
I take photos to think.
Each exposure opening up new points of viewing.
Considering what is in shadows and over exposed,
Framed in a context of artist and teacher, wondering,
How can we make students this empowered about learning?
Which of these are more acceptable to you?

Photo: Lincoln Park, LA  
Photos: Julia Leong, 2011

Deadmau5, San Diego, Ca

Photo: Rome, 2011, Julia Leong
Confronted by the realization that we know little or nothing about the cultural information contained in these images. As I interpret the images, a dialogue is created in which the researcher often comes to the understanding that the subject and viewer may not share the same understanding of the image. Context is important to the understanding of meaning in an image.

So I try to ‘make’ not ‘take’ photographs and try to do so in such a way as to not reinforce patterned ways of thinking but to challenge assumptions about places and people. Opening up possibilities for the viewer to understand the world as others see it, or to discover other points of viewing. While photographs are sometimes thought of as a documentation of ‘the truth.’ I am aware that I still am constrained by social conventions of what is deemed appropriate to photograph. Including a photo of a band is not deemed scholarly but it makes causes me to wonder about motivation in the classroom.

My inquiry began as an investigation into the relationship between pedagogical theory and a visual art examination of life history to learn about their affect teaching and learning. Like a double helix, the artist, researcher and teacher in me are strengthened and supported by their spiraling connections.

Different forms of photography were investigated to see if we can escape a ‘grand narrative’ one version story, and see how multiple viewpoints, could generate new meaning and significance. A/r/tography offers possibilities for linking and looking at how spaces between life, art, and teaching inform and can transform the other. The results are more questions. How are photographs used as narrative texts? What can my photography bring to the institutional setting of schools?

By engaging in a practice of critical reflection about the photos I make, I have come to understand how the nature of our perceptions drives our outlook, outcomes and ultimately direct our lives. My perceptions are influenced by the desire to render the familiar a little strange and to view the world through an artistic filter. I tried to trouble the grand narrative of one commonly held theory, “Bloom’s taxonomy,” to see how it might be viewed using Clandinin and Connely’s narrative lens. Outcomes in Bloom’s taxonomy, when viewed in a narrative inquiry stance, consider the teacher as part of the curriculum, not separate from it. Many outcomes in curriculum require finite answers, but my conclusion is tentative. I hope a result of this study is that my curriculum seeks to illuminate rather than to settle on one right answer.
Teaching requires an autobiographical examination embedded in theory and a self-awareness of one’s history. Pinar (2004) calls this professional study *currere*, from the Latin noun *curriculum*. He explains: “To support the systematic study of self-reflexivity within the processes of education, I devised the method of *currere*. The method of *currere*—the Latin infinitive form of curriculum means to run the course, or, in the gerund form, the running of the course provides a strategy for students of curriculum to study the relations between academic knowledge and life history in the interest of self-understanding and social reconstruction.” (P.259-286)

The photos that I am the most satisfied with are those with stillness, silence and solitude. Those that don’t scream out at me, but cause me to pause and ponder. I wonder why we often become frantic teachers feeling that things have to be learned in a finite amount of time when really we will only achieve a surface understanding of most things in the time allotted to unconnected learning in disparate classes. I continue to learn that when I am in the moment, I can take meaning from the moment, which may lead to longer term wisdom. Perhaps an other pedagogical connection is that we as teachers, need to practice more patiences for learning and we need to do so in a way that evokes a passion for learning. How do we teach in love? How do we allow students to feel empowered and filled with value in who they are and to find value in others in a system where feedback is primarily through grades? Can the use of visual art and critical reflection help slow down learning in schools and make the focus on deep inquiry?

When viewing photos I made, I asked; How are my points of viewing adding to your understanding of how we experience things differently, and ultimately, does that understanding help to develop empathy? How could photography and visual arts be used to develop a more compassionate curriculum?

Through critical reflection on the images one makes, and considering how the visual arts shape one’s practice. The I am letting my photos light the way as a “lamp to the heart” illuminating what I attend to, and offering them back out to others. Reflective practice, through photography, allows us to attend to the now, or immediate experiences and upon reviewing the photos, to bend back on our assumptions and the processes undertaken in the creation of the photo. Although language is often used to describe experiences, language is often not adequate to express qualities of what we experience. Photography provides a space for analogies, for freezing time, suspending
time, and allowing for new statements to be made through the visual and to leave liminal spaces for things unsaid.

Using photography to change perspectives has a transformative possibility of allowing us to see from another’s point of viewing, and can perhaps hold value in the classroom for developing greater empathy. For example, teachers might consider taking photos from “the other side of the desk” or students could re-imagine new possibilities and “paint” their worlds in a new light.

We can see and interpret different visual forms and can create photos of our everyday experiences. However, we may not go beyond the surface of understanding of learning, to make and respond to visual arts and see the role it has in shaping our culture. There is a need to develop visual literacy as a form of expression because our society today is becoming increasingly image based. Images from television, magazines, internet are often shown over a short time span and thus are reduced to easily readable iconic images and stereotypes. What is taught by contemporary visual culture? In our image making, are we repeating what is being fed to the masses, or are we creating new possibilities and points of viewing?

The purpose of retelling sections of our narratives is to offer new possibilities for new ways of seeing and doing things. What I came to realize is that in looking back at how I was living out my life, I saw that it was following the plot line of something resembling a Disney grand narrative. This grand narrative told me that by a certain age you should be doing this, and by another age you should have this and your partner should be “x.” The television told us how we should be living our lives and thinking about relationships.

The analyses and conclusion of the stories are partial, offering a possible point of viewing for understanding the co-construction of self and story. The sharing of photos and the accompanying texts highlight the need for some narration connected with them. The photos triggered much more than the image recorded and thus, it is viewed that while photos can stand alone as a basis for narrative inquiry, they also trigger much more of an experience than just the moment captured. Narratives of the past connect to the present and can inform us of how it is shaped or connected to recollections of the past.
11 Conclusion: Curriculum as Currere

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We can see and interpret different visual forms and can create photos of our everyday experiences. However, we may not go beyond the surface of understanding of learning, to make and respond to visual arts and see the role it has in shaping our culture. There is a need to develop visual literacy as a form of expression because our society today is becoming increasingly image based. Images from television, magazines, internet are often shown over a short time span and thus are reduced to easily readable iconic images and stereotypes. What is taught by contemporary visual culture? In our image making, are we repeating what is being fed to the masses, or are we creating new possibilities and points of viewing?

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The purpose of these field notes and retelling sections of our narratives is to offer new possibilities for new ways of seeing and doing things. What I came to realize is that in looking back at how I was living out my life, it didn’t follow the plot line of something resembling a Disney grand narrative plot line. I was taught that by a certain age you should be doing this, and by another age you should have this and your partner should be “x.” This is what the television told us how we should be living our lives and thinking about relationships.

Narrative inquiry does not prescribe applications for methods but instead creates texts that hopefully offer the readers a place to imagine their own uses for visual art and narrative texts.

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The sharing of photos and the accompanying texts highlight the need for some narration connected with them. The photos triggered much more than the image recorded and thus, it is viewed that while photos can stand alone as a basis for narrative inquiry, they also trigger much more of an experience than just the moment captured. It allows for narratives of the past and connections to be made to the present, or for people to develop understandings of their present and how it is shaped or connected to recollections of the past.

Field note

Am I walking around life like a sensation driven tourist propelled through a predetermined self-guided tour. What do our smiling family photos tell us about our falsified histories? What do the images I have made and kept tell me about what I am gratified by? Am I consumed by the cliches and visual representations we are bombarded by? Are we ultimately embedding students into lethargic curriculum? Will this paper become historical waste?

In/tensions: Field note

As I engaged in narrative inquiry, I was paying attention to what my mind was paying attention to. I focused on three themes of inquiry tension; the tensions of place, time, self and other. Creating, collecting and analyzing the images is only the initial part of the inquiry. The writing and telling about the experience helped to locate my understandings of how I move through and experience things, and what influence these experiences have on my teaching. The people in my life are at the heart of my narratives. Dewey shared that experience is about people’s relations over time and contextually.
Field note

I attended a photo workshop on photographing nudes in art and it brought to mind the word Eros. The modern Greek word, Erotas, meaning romantic love is the root of erotic. Eros drives the body’s need to do what it loves, to learn passionately, to create, and to learn about what is closest to us. What would it mean to have a pedagogy of love? What if students chose what they are passionate about and discussed the things that mattered to them? What spaces would be opened up between people if the boundaries of public and private were brought into viewing? What learning could happen if students and teachers cared about one another more? How might a sharing of what we are passionate about or what we are fearful about bring us closer together? We can use technology to have students view and create images of their world that invite new stories and develop greater empathy, and in this way, develop a pedagogy of love. I am learning I need to be present in the moment more to see my students and colleagues, to “listen with heart” and tell stories of that leave them with “shining eyes.

Field Note

There are tensions created by the grand narratives, which are considered as indicators of ‘rigor’ in a university and the narrative inquiry stance. In narrative, I find writing done in a style that speaks to me more personally. Anxiety arises from my concerns about the types of discourses that are the norms of acceptable practice in academic research, but I was delighted to find scholars who were struggling with, and finding solutions for the same issues. While the hallmark of this research was learning to know oneself through autobiography, we are seeking to find spaces where other possibilities of knowledge representation and ways of knowing can exist. As Dewey (1934) writes, “Imagination is the gateway through which meanings derived from past experiences find their way into the present” (p. 209).

Carl Leggo often writes about the dangers of life writing, his poems in “Growing up perpendicular on the side of a hill,” about his life in Newfoundland. What might we uncover as the sources for our present experiences? How does my upbringing on Vancouver Island with a parent who was a teacher, and a parent who was a draftsman affect my present way of being or my beliefs as an educator?
Field note:

S/place

I am drawn to designed spaces. Many of my thousands of images are of architecture and intentional spaces. The connection to the souls of the creators of these spaces is what I am researching when I photograph myself and others moving through these spaces. What is the experience they want us to have?

Spaces that announce, invite or signal as private.

Reactive spaces, Reclaimed spaces, Self-constructed spaces

Cyber space, Uncertain space

Imaginative spaces, Internal/external spaces:

Architect, Zaha Hadid’s, MAXXI museum of modern art in Rome, creates a dialog between the adjacent traditional buildings and the environment. The rock paths, the leading lines created in the cement, the buttressed support walls, trajectories draw us into the gallery and from the interior, project us to the surrounding gardens. It is like the building functions like a spider, casting webs out in a territorial manner and drawing us in and offers us an experience of simultaneously experiencing interior and exterior places and geographies. As you walk through the gallery, you become momentarily disoriented as the dramatic and overlapping planes make you feel as if you are in one of Escher’s staircases. It throws into question the conventions of spatial organization and invites gallery views to wander in many directions. I felt my attention flitting everywhere like a child with a hypertext mind.

How we arrange space in a classroom is an act of pedagogy. Brooksfield (1995) asks us to consider sitting in a circle and the implications that has on learning. I have always felt the circle can be an intimidating place. Everyone faces each other and a few students usually dominate the circle which can shut down some students or cause others to just blurt things out if they feel that part of their mark is based on participation.
Brooksfield has us reconsider things like having students sitting in a circle is not always as democratic a practice as we think.

Photo: Maxxi, Rome. Julia Leong 2011

This image of the stairs in the Maxxi museum, symbolizes hope for new pathways to be imagined for learning. Perhaps subject area teachers should all take one another on field trips to discover things they know absolutely nothing about. How might we give teachers time to engage in experiences that open up the imagination and offer understandings for possibilities of re-imagining traditions in curriculum, such as including attention to design, or the ways that we convey information? How might we allow students to engage in a practice of artful inquiry? I wonder if sharing this field note would help participants understand my pedagogy? Why does my Masters project have to be bound in a pea green cover with Times Roman font? The fact that most people today know what Times Roman font looks like is a testimony to the preferences and differences in how content is read or perceived differently in different type faces. Daniel Pink (2008) writes about the importance of design in his book “A whole new mind.”

Explosive developments in technology and globalization are imposing new pressures to develop a “whole new mind,” that is, not just a focus on the left brained types of thinking, but to develop right brained skills such as developing creativity, empathy, and what Pink (2008) refers to as “high concept and high touch” thinking. High concept thinking is the capacity to synthesize ideas into something new, to create artistic and emotional impact, and to uncover patterns and opportunities. High touch thinking is the ability to empathize, to understand human relationships, and to find meaning in life.
Pink (2008) explains that mankind was primarily in an age of scarcity until now. Today, we are in an age of abundance as evidenced in the number of home and car owners, and the rise in abundance indicators such as the self-storage and garbage removal business. Asian labour forces and automation are lowering the cost and availability of goods that are available to us, but this is also changing how we consume goods. Pink (2008) argues it is no longer enough for goods to serve a utility function, but because we are in an age of abundance, we are demanding goods that not only serve a utility function, but also have an aesthetic appeal. For example, Target department stores have enlisted world famous designers, such as Philippe Stark, to design everyday household items such as garbage cans and toilet brushes, which Target has sold millions of. This highlights how everyday objects have become elevated in an age of abundance, and because of the lower cost and greater availability of goods, we are demanding goods with not only a utility function, but also an artistic or aesthetic appeal. Manufacturers are recognizing that the way to compete with the low cost of goods from the Far East is to differentiate by design. How might we bring design into our curriculum?

Photo below: Julia Leong 2010 Boston Building Learning Communities teacher’s conference.

Technology is also creating an over-abundance of information available to us through the internet. The value of information is being reduced due to the fact it is being so widely available and instantly accessible. What has begun to matter more is the ability to place facts into context and to make them meaningful by creating emotional appeal? The overabundance of information is creating more of a need to develop the
ability to teach or deliver information through story to make information more memorable. The ability of computers to store facts and carry out routine knowledge work has made it more important to know how to develop a compelling narrative to make an effective argument. Our natural tendency is to think in stories and we want to frame experiences as narratives.

Ralph Gibson interview March 2011

"I embrace the abstract in photography and exist on a few bits of order extracted from the chaos of reality."

Spending time with other photographers, I have learned to see through their eyes, how to render the world anew. Ralph Gibson shoots primarily in black and white to reduce images to the abstract. Learning to see images in black and white has caused me to slow down, to see details, to see the effects of light, to notice shadows and layers of depth that were lost in unattended moments.

I learned to see how negative space could cause a photo to expand or contract within the frame of the photo. I consider the negative space as part of the subject of the image. I never considered negative space could be the subject before.

In the crowd of the city, in the inmost noise of the day,
He understood the story of the agitated shadow.

Photo: Julia Leong 2011

Field note; Self/Other Whistler

Walking through Whistler Village, my pathway to the grocery store is blocked by a small group of tourists arranging themselves for a ‘typical we were here’ group hug photo right on the sidewalk. Like a stalled car on Lion’s Gate bridge, they have created a traffic jam right in front of Starbucks during the morning rush hour. I wait behind the man attempting to take the group’s
photo, watching as he crouches down looking through his viewfinder and simultaneously backs up towards me. I hold my hand out in front of me anticipating his bumpy arrival. He whirls around with apologies. I suggest that I take the photo so he can be etched in the ‘we were here’ photo. A woman is now orchestrating the group into something that resembles the schoolhouse photo, with people on different steps. I am now aware of the audience on the patio of Starbucks that we have now attracted. I looked over the tops of the heads of the group at the green Starbucks mermaid smiling at us from above. Instinctually, I walked behind to the other side of the group so that the snow-capped mountains were in the background and suggested they all turned the other way. “But you won’t be able to see our faces” exclaimed the woman arranging everyone. I turned the flash on, crouched down low and turned the camera off the auto settings and quickly flashed two exposures of smiling lit up faces with glistening snowy peaks rising behind them, and handed the camera back. “I never knew you could turn the flash on in the daytime” the woman exclaimed. The patrons on the patio, return to their Grande, non-fat Americanos.

Being a photographer has helped me shape my teaching. I wonder how teachers entering a graduate program about teaching with technology feel like newcomers to a strange land. We most often take photos of a place when we first arrive. We are curious about the place and want to slow time down to record the experience. How might photography help us to see the classroom anew? How can we get teachers to look back from their positions at the front of the class to see what’s going on from the other side of the desk? Perhaps a strategy that might be implemented is taking photos of our classrooms from new points of viewing, then expanding that notion to see how it serves as a metaphor for what else we need to see from the students’ perspectives, from an ELS learner, from a musical learner. If we were entering the classroom with eyes wide open, imagining curriculum anew, what would our curriculum look like? If we knew more stories about who are students were and what their points of viewing were how would that help create a curriculum of collaboration and care?

If you can see it,

It can move you.

Can you go some place within this image?

Does it take you somewhere?
It’s about finding the humor, the extraordinary, the profound hidden gems in everyday living. It’s my story.

Field note: deFORM, inFORM, reFORM

Link to video field note below:

http://tinyurl.com/medprojectjulia

I explore the notion of reflective practice through the eye of a digital video camera that links two different spaces; a private garden and a school institution. This project explores physical perception and the concept of the non-objectivity of the camera in research. I began by walking the Nitobe gardens and taking videos of my experience of my walk. The editing process made the video obtain a new form each time the sections of video were joined. Sound accentuated another change in the video by pushing the visuals into expanded or distorted representation of common experiences. A third element, the audience, further expanded the reflective process as my video was shared and discussed with others. Layers of interpretation are created as each of these activities; editing, sound, discussion are applied to the video. These layers can be applied for reflective practice in teaching as well.

The accompanying music and lack of descriptive narrative change or distort the usual plot lines and narrative structures. They have been deformed and in turn transformed. It prompts the imagination and hopefully opens up possibilities about the functions of narrative inquiry.

The process and product were representations of my sensory experience travelling to the gardens, arriving and slowing to the tranquil pace that the gardens brought forth. Noticing my lack of attention to my surroundings and the people I rushed past made me question how I go about the hallways in a school and helped me to slow down and experience the people and a space in an entirely new way. What I learned from this experience and want to bring to the classroom, are ways to set up experiences for students to create their own questions and understandings rather than to give them information and call it learning.
Schon (1987) raises the question “what professional education would be appropriate to an epistemology of practice based on reflection – in –action?” Carl Rogers wrote; (1969) “I have come to feel that [the] only learning which significantly influences behaviour is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning.” His ideas helped me to understand the difference between information versus knowledge; education versus training; learning versus teaching.

The implications of Schon’s argument suggests a reversal of the order between academic course work and practicum, putting learning by doing at the core, versus placing the practicum at the end after the academic coursework. We need to teach our students to learn how to learn.
13 Bibliography


