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ABSTRACT

This narrative case study examines the role of storytelling in creating community with grade 7 students. Twelve girls and eleven boys, ages 12 to 13, participated in this classroom-based study. Students engaged in three structured storytelling activities incorporating home-to-school stories, story responses, and classroom presentations. First, students' parents/guardians told a coming-of-age or Confirmation story to their child. Second, at school, students shared their family story with a partner. Third, partners creatively responded to the stories in forms of poems, songs, picture books, research study, stories, or dramatic skits. Students also participated in individual and group reflections based on activities. This research discusses ways in which storytelling activities promoted community connections in a grade 7 classroom through social transactions. Critical questions are raised about the potential of storytelling to promote care and dialogue within a classroom.

Keywords:

storytelling; classroom community; dialogue; story response; multimodal literacy; home-school domains

Subject Terms:

Storytelling—Study and teaching; Language Arts (Elementary); Seventh grade—Education; Storytelling ability in children; Interpersonal relations in children; Dialogue—Study and teaching
DEDICATION

To the storytellers in my life ~ Finn, Trevor, and my Mom and Dad.
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Many people have helped me along this journey. To my creative students who inspired this story thank you for sharing your narratives with us. My thesis defence committee, Dr. Kelleen Toohey, Dr. Meguido Zola, Dr. Charles Bingham, and Dr. Rosamund Stooke, thank you for delving deeper into this research study with me. Without my supervisor, Rosamund Stooke, I would still be drowning in stories and books. Thank you for pushing me to see clearer and to keep writing. Finally, thank you to my family and friends for listening to my stories.
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CHAPTER 1: THE TELLING OF THE STORY

Whomsoever is still awake
at the end of a night of stories,
will surely become
the wisest person in the world.

An old family blessing
Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1995)

My thesis explores classroom storytelling as a way to nurture a sense of community in the classroom. More specifically, it describes a classroom-based case study where I took on the role of a teacher-researcher in my own classroom. I documented and analyzed the outcomes of activities in which grade seven students (aged twelve to thirteen) shared their parents' and guardians' 'growing up' stories at school. I also used those stories as the basis for discussion and response activities during the students' preparation for the Roman Catholic rite of the sacrament of Confirmation. In this chapter I share with readers the story behind my thesis. It is a personal story in which my own love of storytelling plays a leading role.

In my classroom I turn to storytelling as a means of creating caring, emotionally safe, culturally valuable, relational havens in which my students and I can learn, explore and grow. I believe storytelling provides a way to teach about life, just as teaching is "a way of life" (Hogan, 2003, p.209). According to Aidan
Chambers (1991), telling a story "is more like conversation, and feels personal, as if the storyteller is giving the listener something of himself" (p.58). Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1995), a Jungian psychoanalyst and cantadora (keeper of the old stories), states that among her people, both Magyar and Mexicano, they consider story [their] living relative, and so it seems to [them] completely sensible that as one friend invites another friend to join in the conversation, so, too, a certain story calls forth a specific second story, which in turn evokes a third story, and frequently a fourth and a fifth, and occasionally several more, until the answer to a single question has become several stories long. (p.5)

In other words, Estés is saying that storytelling creates spaces for dialogue and the forging of community connections.

In Estés' family, the elders practice a tradition called "make-story" where they would say to the young people: "We are going to test you to see if you are gaining any knowledge worth having. Come, come now, give us a story from scratch. Let us see you flex your story muscles" (p.5). Being a teacher, I too have wondered how my students could 'flex their story muscles' to reach out to each other. Prior to the beginning of the school year I start promoting community in my classroom. In June I request next year's students to create a memory jar over the summer. In September students individually share the contents of their memory jars with the class. I recall that children who vacationed together and enjoyed many experiences in common sometimes shared stories that testify to the unique nature of personal experience. I recall too that children who did not see each other over the summer would sometimes share similar stories. I conceptualized the memory jar activity as a means of building community and as a means of honouring diversity.
The memory jar activity, like all storytelling, is not an activity with predictable outcomes. Rather it is a relational accomplishment shared by the storytellers and their audience. The memory jar activity reminds me that stories, whether written or read aloud, are most often about human connections.

How did stories come into being? Ah, stories came into the world because God was lonely...the void at the beginning of time was very dark...because it was so tightly packed with stories that not even one story stood out from the others...Stories are therefore without form, and the face of God moved over the deep, searching and searching – for a story...It was not stories that had been missing from creation, but rather, and most especially, the soulful humans who could tell them. (Estés, pp.5-9)

As a daughter, a mother, and a teacher, I have personally witnessed the connecting power of stories. My own parents and relatives shared their stories and the stories of the Irish people, at the dinner table or gathering around the fireplace. It was from my Nana (grandmother) that I first encountered the legends of Finn and the Fianna, Bran, Cuchulain, Emer, Niamh and Oisin. It was from my Dad that I first learned about modern Irish heroes such as Eamon de Valera, Michael Collins and Constance Markiewicz. These stories linked me to my cultural past. Now I in turn share these stories with my son in a belief that stories can bind us together with a common thread of understanding.

As a teacher I wish to nurture common threads of understanding among my students. I also seek to recognize differences and nurture a sense of possibility. As Sergiovanni (1994) claimed, "building community in schools is about a shared quest to do things differently, to develop new kinds of relationships, to create new ties, to make new commitments" (p.153). My goal is
to foster the development of a learning community, a group of people who are “defined by their centers of values, sentiments and beliefs” and are “organized around relationships and ideas” (Sergiovanni, 1999, p.15), a place where everyone is part of the learning cycle (Dalton & Watson, 1997). Dalton and Watson contend that schools can provide spaces for community membership and identify several key qualities of classroom communities. Communities are spaces where caring relationships are fostered, humane values are taught, intrinsic motivation is honoured, and learning for understanding is encouraged. The key to building learning communities is dialogue; a word derived from the Greek word *dialogos*, *dia* meaning ‘through’, ‘between’, ‘across’, ‘by’, ‘of’ and/or ‘passing through’ and *logos* meaning ‘to speak’ and ‘the word’. Dialogue in English can be a noun to refer to a particular kind of conversation or as a verb, for example when people ‘dialogue with each other’.

How can working with stories in the classroom provide spaces for dialogue? Can new meanings and understandings emerge from a passing through of meaningful stories from parent to child or from one child to another? In my experience, a sense of community develops out of the sharing of and talking about stories. I have read aloud many works of fiction in my classroom to promote discussion of ethical and social issues. For example, *The Breadwinner* (Ellis, 2000), evoked dialogue about racism and courage through discussion of the plight of a young Afghan girl and her family during the era of the Taliban regime. Students also responded to issues raised in *Coraline* (Gaiman, 2003), a novel in which the child protagonist confronts isolation and falls prey to the
seductive power of the image of 'the mother' who can fulfil her expectations. In addition to discussing stories, my students also dramatized them: stories from around the world, myths of ancient Rome, a quest in Middle Earth, and even a battle between light and dark as depicted in so many Japanese comic books. The richness of the dialogue that ensued from the transmediation of narrative texts into dramas deeply impressed me. As students came to feel more comfortable with sharing ideas and grew increasingly articulate in describing their feelings and responses to books and characters, I noticed subtle changes in the tone of the class. Talking about the issues brought us closer together as a group and a sense of community continuously evolved and contributed in salient ways to the positive social atmosphere in our classroom. For these reasons, as well as for the sheer pleasure of storytelling with my students, I encourage all students to share their stories, both personal narratives and responses to works of literature. However, it was the students' excitement and engagement in the interaction and collaboration that prompted me to delve further into classroom storytelling as a source of community connection and to systematically investigate the role that specific storytelling activities play in nurturing a sense of community.

As noted earlier, my thesis reports on a classroom-based case study (Creswell, 1998, p.36). I examined social transactions among grade seven students in a British Columbia Lower Mainland Independent school during their preparation for the Roman Catholic sacrament of Confirmation. Confirmation refers to one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic faith. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) the sacrament of Confirmation, together
with Baptism, forms the initiation rites of the Church as it "perfects Baptismal grace", gives of the Holy Spirit's divinity, strengthens the bond between the faithful and the Church, and helps "bear witness to the Christian faith in words accompanied by deeds" (p.284). Whereas Baptism, in most Catholic rites, is the beginning of one's life in the Church, Confirmation signifies maturing growth as a person and as a Catholic. In my school's district, this sacrament is conferred upon grade seven students after a school year of preparation and community service. Participating in this sacrament requires the Confirmand (recipient of the sacrament) to commit himself/herself to living the faith and continuing to be a practicing Catholic with all the requirements therein. During this year of Confirmation preparation, students are asked to explore their own faith and to become an "adult" in the Church.

For the month prior to their Sacrament of Confirmation ceremony the students and I engaged in structured storytelling activities. For the activities reported here, I requested them to ask their parents or guardians to tell about their own Confirmation or another coming-of-age event. I said, "When you go home this weekend ask your parents to tell you a story about their Confirmation. But if they haven't been confirmed, or do not remember, you can ask them to tell you about a time when they remember feeling grown up for the first time." Such a story could be described as a turning point or a poignant memory in which the parent or guardian first felt 'like an adult'.

My pedagogical goals for this activity included an aim to foster reciprocity and intercultural understanding among my students. I was interested in the
stories themselves, but I was especially interested in the students' transactions when sharing the stories and in their responses to one another's stories. Specifically, I asked the following questions: When students create and collaboratively respond to each other's family stories, what commonalities exist among the stories and the responses to them? What possibilities for dialogue arise out of storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing? What positive social connections do students identify in their reflections on the storytelling and response activities? As noted earlier, the outcomes of storytelling activities cannot be predetermined. In my role of practitioner researcher, I tried to remain open to new insights and questions as they arose throughout the study.

I explored my questions through several activities: a home-to-school story assignment as described above, a partner-share in which each student shared their coming-of-age narrative with another student, and an activity in which the students creatively presented their partners' stories to the whole class in the form of a play, a poem, a song or a picture book. In the classroom, we referred to these activities as storytelling, story-dialogue, and story sharing. After the partner share and the creative presentations, students participated in individual and group reflections on the activities. In other words, students were engaged in reflection on their own practice in a form of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Through the storytelling, story-dialogue, and story sharing activities, I aimed to create a space for students to engage in dialogue (Buber, 1970, Freire, 2003) and to foster syncretic literacy (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.157), the merging
of different cultural practices in one literacy event. I also wanted students to realize that they too can be storytellers and keepers of their families' histories. I wanted them to draw on dialogue as a resource for the creation of new texts and new possibilities for being in community. "Storytellers were never mere echoes, but creative performers, putting their personal stamp on traditional tales" (Rosen, 1988, p.171). I believed above all that storytelling would engage the imaginations of my students. As educator and storyteller Betty Rosen (1988) eloquently states: "The students undoubtedly already know how to begin and end stories, but... new and exciting possibilities emerge as they [are] encouraged to reflect upon alternative strategies" (p.168). Finally, it was my hope that through participation in storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing in the classroom, students would connect with each other in meaningful ways, as well as connect with their teacher, parents and guardians resulting in a connection with their cultural backgrounds.

Can this idea of inter-generational learning enhance our entire learning community, both in our classrooms as well as in our local community? (Sugrue, 1999). Underpinning my research activities was a desire to find ways in which students might include their out of school "funds of knowledge" (Moll, et al, 2005) in their learning at school. According to the New Literacy Studies perspective, "literacy is tied to students' cultural backgrounds" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.5). I therefore wonder if the sharing of parents' stories can help bridge gaps in cultural understanding among classmates and what dialogues might occur among
students, their parents and guardians, and their teachers if everyone was
involved in story sharing?

My thesis reports, analyzes and reflects on the storytelling, story-dialogue
and story sharing activities. I will also consider some practical implications for
classroom teachers whose visions extend beyond the implementation of
government mandated subject curricula. In the following chapter I first summarize
a body of research literature in the area of classroom storytelling; I then present
and discuss insights gleaned from literary theory, including Reader Response
theory and New Literacy Studies. I also draw on philosophical writings on the
subject of dialogue and its relationship to the development of caring classroom
communities. Chapter Three describes the methodology I undertook for the
study. Chapter Four discusses and analyzes the data. Finally, Chapter Five
presents my conclusions, questions and concerns, and suggests some
implications both for my practice and for future inquiries.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Meggie had met many people who loved books, sold them, collected them, printed them, or, like her father, prevented them from falling apart, but she had never before met anyone who wrote the words that filled a book’s pages. She didn’t even know the names of the authors of some of her favorite stories, let alone what they looked like. She had seen only the characters who emerged from the words to meet her, never the writer who made them up.

Cornelia Funke (2003), *Inkheart*, p.250

2.1 Introduction

My goals for this chapter are (1) to locate my study within a body of research and professional literature on the topic of storytelling (2) to provide a rationale for my study, and (3) to describe the theoretical ideas that inform the study. While I cannot make any claims for the generalizability of my findings, I contend that the study can make a unique contribution to conversations about storytelling in classroom settings and the use of storytelling to promote social justice in and out of the classroom. The chapter is organized in three sections. First I summarize and discuss research and professional literature for teachers on the topic of storytelling. I then examine some theoretical literature on the same topic. Finally, I discuss ideas about dialogue and care in classrooms and link these ideas to the earlier discussion of storytelling. I begin by restating the questions I aimed to address in my research. They are: When students create and collaboratively respond to each other’s family stories what commonalities exist among the stories and the responses? What possibilities for dialogue arise
out of storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing? And, what positive social connections do students identify in their reflections on the storytelling and response activities?

2.2 Storytelling in the classroom: Themes and claims

Storytelling is often associated with folklore, a group’s oral texts that are handed down from one generation to the next. Jane Yolen (2000) describes folklore as “the perfect guidebook to the human psyche”. Folk stories are imperfect histories that are “constantly transforming and being transformed, putting on, chameleonlike, the colors of its background” (p.44). By following “a story through its variants [we] are following the trade routes, the slave routes, the route of a conquering army, or that of a restless people on the move” (p.22). Our myths and folktales “provide a landscape of allusion”, allow us to look at cultures through their very being (“from the inside out”), assisting us in processing our experiences, and provide a framework for our own belief systems (p.15-17).

Folktales can also help the young reader make sense of the natural world (Bosma, 1992). Bosma (1992, p.3) observes that reading different explanations of natural phenomena and ideas clarifies the child’s own views. But most importantly, folklore connects us to our collective pasts. “We hear stories about our family and stories about our tribe and stories about the world. And through these we place ourselves in time and space, and slowly construct identities that we call by our names” (Chambers, 1991, p.58).
A theme of advocacy runs through both research and professional literature on storytelling with children. Storytelling is generally described as a ‘good thing to do’ and a vehicle for the development of children’s literacy and social confidence. For example, renowned storytellers Augusta Baker and Ellin Greene emphasize in their book, *Storytelling: Art and Technique* (1987), that storytelling is a listening and language experience that cannot be lost. Baker and Greene include a chapter on children as storytellers and observe the importance of promoting storytelling techniques with children and their peers. According to Baker and Greene, not only do children further develop their literacy skills, but they learn to listen and construct their own stories. They then present three contemporary storytelling programs as models to encourage educators to introduce children to storytelling.

Jeff Creswell (1997) is an educator and proponent of the Scottish Storyline method of questioning and integrating subjects through curriculum. “The Storyline method is based on the theory that knowledge is complex and many layered, that learning is guided by one’s prior knowledge and experience, and that learners construct their own meaning through action and experience (Creswell, p.3). This student-centered method creates a place for all voices to be heard and a space in which everyone has the potential to learn. Describing his Storyline based on Barbara Smucker’s *Underground to Canada*, Creswell stated that he “had underestimated the validating power of studying one’s own history” when one of his African-American students was overheard saying to a classmate that this Storyline was going to be the best one yet “because this one is about my
people” (p.85). Storyline episodes are designed to be vehicles for developing language and critical thinking skills. The Storyline method is designed to include three interconnected aspects of philosophy, method and strategy. Philosophically, students start with what they already know about the teacher-led topic and continue to explore the topic using their imaginations, as they are facilitated with questions and research by the teacher. The six guiding principles to be used for any topic include the principles of story, anticipation, the teacher's rope, ownership, context, and structure (p.10-12). Of particular relevance to my study is the principle of story that reaffirms how story is central to the human experience and is a powerful mode to teach curriculum in a way that mirrors real life. The method portion of Storyline includes the story elements of: setting the scene in a particular time and place; the inclusion of people and/or animals; a way of life to be investigated; and real problems to be solved. Structurally, Storyline encompasses the four critical issues of scheduling, planning, teaming and grouping. In his study, Creswell constructed his Storyline units for children in grades three to five and easily integrated the episodes throughout the curriculum. Not only were his students given opportunities to explore their own lives and the lives of the students around them, they were the ones to find meaning in their learning experiences.

Another advocate for storytelling and reading aloud in the classroom, Bob Barton (1986, 2000) used the analogy of helping students 'uncrate the story', of "finding stories inside the story, of exploring layers of meaning" (1986, p.91). Barton and his colleague, David Booth, (Booth & Barton, 2000) eloquently state
that “as story sharers, we become all the voices we have ever heard” (p.30). Not only does storytelling create connections between the teller and the listener, but storytelling also promotes self-esteem.

An important byproduct of storytelling is a new level of confidence and self-esteem for the teller. Even the shyest child, when given the opportunity to share a story with another person, finds acceptance of both story and self a rewarding experience. Indeed, an important aim of nurturing children as storytellers is to help them develop confidence in themselves as communicators, and a sense of self-worth in their ability to share stories with their peers. (Mallan, 1992, p.15)

Booth and Barton (2000) remind readers of the importance of traditional oral storytelling to the life of a community. When one person tells a story the listener retells it, with their own twists and turns to play with, creating a story with a new author. Both people then tell a third person their stories and that person creates a fourth story that still contains the resemblance of the original tellers. Now, the original storyteller has three more stories to add to their collection. “Such is membership in the story culture. We tell our own stories – our daydreams, our gossip, our family anecdotes. We become human through our stories” (p.7).

The noted storyteller, Margaret Read MacDonald (1999), writes that a story event can serve a host of functions. Notably for this study, a tale can influence others, can pass on information, and can allow for playtime, perhaps especially for the person who would usually not tell a story (p.411). For the individual listener, a storytelling event provides a sense of belonging, and opportunities for the listener to get to know the speaker better. It can also encourage identification (p.412).
Can sharing stories be a vehicle for social change? It was my hope that through students' storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing, they could see their parents and their peers in a different light and with more tolerance of differences among them. Nelson (2005, cited in Henderson & May, 2005) shares my hope that being exposed to a wide variety of literature helps students "view the world with more tolerance, understanding, and acceptance" (p.131). King (1993) studied storymaking and drama with secondary and post secondary students and contends that sharing stories, particularly "world stories enriches our capacity to integrate disparate inner and outer fragments, clarifying and enlarging our sense of identity and our place in our community and the world" (p.2). King believes "that without telling and sharing stories through storymaking and drama, our communities die" (p.4). As many families already lack a sense of real community through feelings of isolation and separation from family, "sharing stories and making drama are excellent ways to build community within the classroom, to create a communal space where students feel safe to express opinions not yet fully formed or clearly understood and to discover the stories of their lives and of their society" (p.4-5).

In addition to the proliferation of literature advocating for storytelling in the classroom, there are a number of research accounts that discuss storytelling in educational settings. Most notable among these accounts that informed my study are those of Vivien Gussin Paley, Betty Rosen, Robin Mello, Courteney Cazden, Jack Zipes, Anne Haas Dyson and Celia Genishi. What follows is a brief overview of the work of each these scholars.
Paley (1979, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, &1999) is a teacher researcher who draws on children’s stories and storytelling to encourage her students to engage in dialogue about the challenges of community life in kindergarten. During her career as a teacher at the Laboratory preschool of the University of Chicago, Paley developed multilayered narrative pedagogies. Her writing also takes a narrative form. Paley questions what children need in order to grow into loving and good people and she has studied the possibility that Kindergarten does provide the groundwork for all future moral growth. Paley’s writing expresses her conviction that story is at the heart of the early childhood classroom and that story offers opportunities for goodness and kindness to flow. She is inspired by the ability of schoolchildren to make their dreams, intentions and conflicts become story dramas. For example, she describes how children create inclusive dramas in which everyone has a voice. In The Girl with the Brown Crayon (1997), Paley discusses how she developed a curriculum based on books by Leo Lionni and describes her students’ growth and learning during the school year. Two of Lionni’s books were of special significance: Swimmy (1967), where Swimmy, a tiny black fish, teaches all the other tiny fish how to evade the bigger fish by working together and schooling to look like a bigger fish; and Frederick (1967), where Frederick the mouse’s contribution to getting ready for winter is by collecting stories to share. Paley (1997) created the term “narrative continuity” to describe her classroom’s parallel play approach in which children play, learn and figure out social issues together (p.74). At one point it occurred to Paley “that a storyteller is yet another kind of Swimmy hero, bringing an otherwise distracted
group of people together for the purpose of being lifted up and carried away on the wings of imagery and language" (1997, p.65). It is in kindergarten that Paley expects to contest society's commitment to 'survival of the fittest', or at least to give all children opportunities to participate. Paley writes that "the group must change its attitudes and expectations toward those who, for whatever reason, are not yet part of the system" (1992, p.33). Here, in kindergarten, a group of children can begin to build a more caring society where everyone's voices are heard and everyone can have an important role to play.

In *The Kindness of Children*, Paley (1999) described the reactions of a group of kindergarten children to her 97-year-old mother. Paley discusses the issue of loneliness as a major moral struggle for children as well as for adults. There is no connectedness with another person where loneliness exists, there is only the individual struggle. However, with stories children create moments of connection. In her story, *The Boy Who Would be a Helicopter* (1990), Paley wonders why her young students continuously interrupt each others' stories. Then, she realizes that the reason her students interrupt each other is because they are active in the collaborative storytelling. Storytelling is "a shared process, a primary cultural institution, the social art of language" (1990, p.23). Perhaps this is why "children give each other roles to play in their continual inquiry into the nature of human connections" (1999, p.61). Paley concludes that it is not the actual content of the stories that is important to the children but the "realization that they are able to make up stories and imagine themselves inside the stories of other children" (1999, p.114). After reading Lionni's *Mr. McMouse* (1992),
Paley's students discussed how their friends were a mirror image of themselves. One of Paley's kindergarten students, Reeny, stated that "friendship is everything" and that friends give you strength and purpose (1997, p.90). Wanting to continue the sense of community her own class shared, Reeny encouraged her teacher to leave the student work about Lionni's stories up on the classroom walls. Reeny hoped that next year's students would have a head start on learning and understanding about friendship, uniqueness, and working together.

Betty Rosen's (1988) account of storytelling with teenagers corroborates Paley's ideas. Teaching in a multicultural comprehensive boys' school in North London, Rosen told stories to her students and then had her students tell them back to the class through writing, drama, or straightforward retelling. She "learned, once and for all, that story retelling in the classroom is a powerful and neglected source of achievement for pupils" (p.51). Rosen's work well demonstrates that storytelling can provide space, ownership of story, language and ideas, and a story community, as well as an outlet for creativity, artistic thoughts and movement. Rosen speculated on ways that "storytelling and story retelling allow a child's view of the world to emerge, safely" (p.105). She prompted students to tell stories by asking questions about their lives: "Has anyone got a scar? How did you get it?" or "Were you ever scared in the middle of the night? Such questions elicit story upon story, stories within stories that beget stories in others. No one is left out, because each child is subject to the narrative of his own living" (p.13). Rosen taped some of the stories and responses in her class, stories ranging from banshee sightings, ghosts and
spirits to mundane ordinary events (p.13-14). “It made no difference if the tale was secondhand as long as it was not told as such: the idea was to “revision” it so it became, for the moment, the exclusive creation of the teller” (p.15).

Reflecting on her practice, Rosen writes:

Teaching has provided the answers to much speculation about the real nature of people. There are no duplicates of individuals anywhere in the world, which is indeed vast, and each one is miraculously unique. To wrinkle out that uniqueness has been a perpetual task in my job, and in doing it I found ample cause for confidence in people. Perhaps teaching is about seeing behind this one’s obscenities and that one’s silence”. (p.9)

Rosen learned from one of her participating classes that “the first resource of the classroom was not what I brought but what was brought by the pupils” (original italics, p.11). For example, there was Abit from Turkey, who could not speak or write in English, but could converse and write in both Turkish and Greek. Rosen found a story on grandparents in Turkish and in English and asked Abit to read aloud the Turkish portion. The other students then realized that Abit was literate in another language and was just as smart as they were. Rosen also used Abit’s version of The Boy Who Cried Wolf to inspire stories from her class. After the finished pieces were presented brilliantly, she commented: “I knew it was the result of magic, the magic of narration itself – the telling, the retelling, the talking about, the dramatization of, the reflection upon – the gestalt of story” (p.32).

Rosen discovered that a sense of community became apparent in the classroom with the creation of stories. In her original storytelling class, “a communal spirit accentuated the individuality of its members because the contribution each made, whether in dialogue or in presenting a piece of original composition, emerged within an atmosphere of acceptance and respect. Each
individual, therefore, had the space to become more intensely himself" (p.42).

Rosen noticed too that this classroom of students worked so well together they “built up a store of shared attitudes and behaviours” which Rosen often facilitated. She hoped that their experience together was training for life and that when they left school for their “different communities – of workers, of neighbours, of local, regional and world citizens – such caring principles remained with them” (p.42). Echoing the voices of numerous educators, Rosen found that “story-hearing cannot be a solitary matter, however; it is essentially and literally communal” (p.72). Rosen found that being told a story gave the listeners more opportunities to respond as well as reflect upon the story itself. Rosen found “the impulse to narrative is already present in every student, and that a storytelling culture in the classroom refines and enlarges upon that impulse” (p.168).

Rosen (1988, p.162) described stories as “infinite as the stars that twinkle”. She said children’s stories are as numerous as those stars. This, she says, is why stories are so important and why a classroom storytelling culture is necessary. Regarding storytelling and retelling, Rosen found that

To use storytelling as a major way of teaching and learning there must be, above all else, the certainty that children (all children, all people) have the capacity to transform and create out of what they receive.... But to close the books, look at the kids, tell them a story from scratch, then ask them to tell that story back again...puts the whole process into a new dimension. It presupposes an enormous confidence in people to know that something new and good will come from every child. (p.8)

In her research, Rosen’s students “made rich stories. And while making those stories together, they made friendships. And they also made peace. And none of it was nonsense” (p.132).
Mello (2001) and Dyson (1989, 1994, 1997) likewise write of the influence of storytelling activities on the formation of community in classrooms. Teacher-storyteller and researcher Robin Mello (2001) examined four ethnographic, arts-based studies that investigated responses to traditional oral narratives in primary classroom settings, a student-teacher university course and in a university storytelling course designed for educators. Mello observed in her study *Passing the Torch: Developing Students' Professional Identity through Connected Narratives* (2001), how storytelling transformed the educators' perspectives about themselves and their own storytelling voices and allowed open communication and connections between teachers and students. Mello's students realized that using reflective narratives allowed them to think deeply about their teaching beliefs and practice. In *The Power of Storytelling: How Oral Narrative Influences Children's Relationships in Classrooms* (2001), her study with grade four students, Mello defines storytelling as an activity that allows others to share personal negotiated transactions, most importantly through performance art. She was curious about the impact of orally told traditional tales on student's learning and about ways to deepen student's responses. Like Paley and Rosen, Mello too found that students' reflections on the qualities of story characters deepened as the students continued to discuss the stories they heard and, because of this, Mello's questions had to change "in order to better represent their thinking, reflectivity, and input" (p.4).

By providing a safe, respectful and creative environment, including multicultural stories, Mello felt able to empower the students and their viewpoints.
She concluded that her participants were impacted by the storytelling activity as they “participated actively and with a high degree of interest” (p.6). They were more empathetic towards each other and Mello sensed a growing feeling of connectedness in the classroom. Interestingly, the students all had positive responses and enjoyed the storytelling sessions (p.7). Mello observed that the students often “discussed the plots of stories by relating them to their own life experience” (p.6). Through their interactions with historical stories students gained further understanding of history, played with language, and put themselves in the footsteps of past heroes. Mello also writes that students were not as interested in the content of the story as in the sharing process. As one student put it, in “the way stories get told and the relationship that developed between the teller and the listener” (p.7). Interestingly, another student observed that when stories were told aloud the teller was behaving “like an ambassador because she was bringing stories from other cultures and other places to the school” (p.8). Mello noted too that student reflection and post-reflection on stories was essential to providing an educative storytelling environment that aided students in increasing their knowledge about themselves and others.

Jack Zipes (1995) found that “the process of learning how to tell a story is the process of empowerment” (p.4). Zipes offers a rare critical voice among advocates of storytelling in the classroom. Although Zipes encourages teachers to be storytellers, he looks critically at the practice of inviting storytellers into classroom and questions the impact these ongoing sessions have on a child’s sense of self and the classroom community. Zipes does not believe that the
storyteller can bring community to schools, but that storytellers can play a role in community development. Storytellers do not make children better readers but “the storyteller can animate them so they feel desire to read, write, act and draw, so they want to express themselves critically and imaginatively with techniques they may learn from the storyteller and teacher” (p.7). He also cautions readers that fairytales and traditional stories were created and told by adults and they express “an adult viewpoint on family relations and power” (p.220). Contrary to the utopian stories of happily every after, Zipes finds that “though they may ultimately defend the right of children and underdogs to survive, they do so only by rationalizing the actions of the adults, who want to make certain that their children are socialized to forget the abuse they have suffered” (p.220). Zipes particularly notes that all the stories in the Grimm’s collection contain issues of “parental oppression” (p.222). Storytelling does not need to overlook the abuses of our world, which creates a further disservice to children, but “can be used to explore social conditions, provide narrative tools for children, enhance pleasure through insight into the causes of conflict, and teach young listeners to grasp differences between people and alternatives to distressing situations” (p.223). But storytellers, like teachers, are not therapists, and cannot attribute healing to storytelling. Rather, they can use their stories to tell truths and provide opportunities for dialogue.

Courteney Cazden (1994) too takes a critical stance toward classroom storytelling. Having studied the common routine of ‘sharing time’ in primary classrooms, she questions how teachers should proceed when their students’
stories are unfamiliar to them. She argues that teachers need, first, to listen carefully in order for all children's stories to be heard and appreciated and, second, must ensure that every student to receive equal and sufficient time to tell their tale. This provides a space for 'making connections' between teachers and students.

Anne Haas Dyson (1994) proposes that stories function as a type of 'textual crossroad', which lets children negotiate their roles and domains. Dyson and her colleague, Celia Genishi (Dyson & Genishi, 1994), have written prolifically on the topic of identity in their accounts of young children's literacy practices at school. They contend that in the school domain, the children do their own social work: children build relationships among themselves and they do so by using familiar tools brought into the classroom from their lives outside school. These tools are stories, jokes, songs, language plays, and other cultural forms or genres that people create as they construct their social lives together. “In such ways, individual lives are woven together through the stuff of stories” (Dyson & Genishi, 1994. p.5).

Dyson (1994) also views stories as “vehicles for bringing diverse voices into the classroom itself” (p.168). She observes that social and cultural boundaries are crossed not only because of the children's stories but also in the gathering of students to enjoy each others' stories. It requires effort to transform a group of students into a community of learners where everyone is a member. Dyson (1997) discusses the importance of membership in a group and how it involves some sort of 'marker' or "badge of inclusion" (p.53). Markers, which
could be “literate artefacts” such as books and stories, are important to building community because they provide evidence to the students that their voices matter.

Dyson & Genishi (1994) describe the conditions necessary for storytelling to benefit students.

This intermingling of voices and exploring of story possibilities can only happen in classrooms where stories themselves are allowed and, just as critically, when they exist within a larger classroom context of diverse story models, appreciative, respectful listening, reflective talking, and playful ways with words. That is, the official imaginative universe of the classroom must be a permeable one, for, in culturally diverse classrooms, students will collectively embody more ways with words, more lived worlds than their teacher. (p.6)

Likewise, Mallan (1992) observes that stories can provide reference points for children and children’s stories provide opportunities for them “to reflect on events and make sense of the experience” (p.12). Through her research, Mallan found that “by sanctioning children’s role as storyteller we [as teachers] enable them to communicate genuinely to others not only their stories, but much about themselves as people” (p.14).

As do the earlier mentioned advocates of storytelling, Dyson and Genishi (1994), claim that “in narratives, our voices echo those of others in the sociocultural world” and “we evidence cultural membership both through our ways of crafting stories and in the very content of our tales” (p.4). Their perspective on storytelling as a social practice locates their work within New Literacy Studies – a field to which I return later in this chapter – but what their work also shares with Paley’s is an ability to show how community develops through storytelling.
My survey of the literature on classroom storytelling suggests that it consists chiefly of qualitative accounts. I found no experimental or quasi-experimental studies. Much of what I found was editorial in nature. I do not wish to critique findings based on researcher use of the narrative form. Harold Rosen in his postscript for And None of it Was Nonsense (1988), remarks on “the uncanny power of narrative as a means of presenting, analyzing and weighing experiences, the teacher’s experiences of using narrative as a focus of classroom practice” (p.163). However, as a teacher-researcher, I am not willing to take the power of storytelling for granted. I therefore include in my literature review a survey of theoretical literature on stories.

2.3 Theorizing Storytelling

Barbara Hardy (1968) observes: “We dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and live in narrative.” I have examined accounts of teaching with narratives. Now, I relate ideas of several narrative theorists whose work also informs my study. In the theoretical literature I examined stories are discussed in relation to imagination, as tools for personal emancipation, as mental constructions and products of interpretations, and as vehicles that promote community connections. Specifically I discuss the ideas of Michael Huberman, Jerome Bruner, Kieran Egan, and Robert Cole.

distinctive way of *presenting* personal and social perceptions, or, rather, the study of a qualitatively distinct way of *representing* those perceptions – a different way of knowing?” (p.129). Huberman claims, “narrative becomes the vehicle of choice both in capturing the ways that people actually constitute self-knowledge and in soliciting them to convey personal meaning by organizing their experience along a temporal or sequential dimension” (p.130). He further states that “narratives can therefore be vehicles for a kind of personal emancipation”, but decided that not enough “hard data” support the notion that “narratives themselves are key to the process” (p.140).

Jerome Bruner’s analysis of the life stories in *Life as Narrative* (1994) highlighted his practice in experimental psychology and gave the psychology research community a new way to think about the phrase ‘a well examined life’. Bruner (1994) questions if “stories do not happen in the real world but, rather, are constructed in people’s heads” then should autobiographies “be viewed not as a record of what happened, but rather as a continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of our experience?” (p.28). He and his colleagues were interested in how people viewed their own lives: “We are asking whether there is in each account a set of selective narrative rules that lead the narrator to structure experience in a particular way, structure it in a manner that gives form to the context and the continuity of life” (p.30). Bruner chose one family from the data ‘portraits’ as their focus “because it constitutes a miniature culture and provides an opportunity to explore how life stories are made to mesh with each other” (p.29). He argues “that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told – or
more bluntly, a life is not "how it was" but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted, told and retold" (p.36). Since what we say and understand guides our lives, do life stories 'tell' our entire lives? Just as Dyson and Genishi (1994) found that "children, like adults, use narrative to shape and reshape their lives, imagining what could have or should have happened, as well as what did happen" (p.2), so Bruner surmised that "stories yield rich texts" (p.29). He wondered if, when people put their narratives together to tell stories, they also tell the listener more about themselves than just what they are relating. Bruner wondered if "any story one may tell about anything is better understood by considering other possible ways in which it can be told" (p.36-37).

Educational theorist, Kieran Egan (1986, 1988, 1997, & 2005) draws on structural aspects of narrative forms to identify cognitive tools for making sense of the world. In The Educated Mind (1997), Egan proposes a range of cognitive tools. Egan encourages teachers "to build gradually and randomly a particular level of knowledge about the world that stimulates, bit by bit, wonder and awe at being alive in this world at this time" (1997, p.219). Story offers powerful cognitive tools for students to engage imaginatively with content knowledge. Stories shape our emotional understanding of content and they can shape real-world content as well as fictional material. "It is this real-world story-shaping that promises most value for teaching" (2005, p.2). Storytelling provides both teachers and learners with the tools to either engage or disengage from situations and be able to discuss issues of importance.
Egan's cognitive tools suggest an approach to planning curriculum that differs from the ones generally used in the current British Columbia education system, but Egan believes that by drawing on cognitive tools in classroom activities, students will develop a greater range of abilities. Developing the characteristics of mythic understanding, such as metaphor, “is a direct consequence of language development” (1997, p.37). Egan (1997) is also concerned with the emotional qualities of story and considers “the story-shaping of experience so that events, facts, ideas and people may be made affectively meaningful” (p.64). Egan claims that children tend to lose interest in concrete descriptions but often become intrigued in abstract concepts, love and hate, courage and selfishness (1986, p.8).

Storytelling creates an interactive response between the reader/listener and the storyteller/text. Robert Cole learned from his mentor William Carlos Williams the importance of sharing stories: “Their story, yours, mine – it’s what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them” (In Cole, 1980, p.30). Through his work with psychiatric patients, Cole (1980) saw how a “story can possess [an] immediacy... as it connects so persuasively with human experience” (p.204). Cole studied the stories of his young psychiatric patients, finding he had conversations with them instead of interviews and came to know them as people, not just as patients, by exchanging ideas, stories and having literary discussions (p.32).
2.4 Theorizing Responses to Stories

To what extent do storytelling activities resemble reading activities?

Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 2005), focusing on researching the reading process, believes "a reading event is like a journey" (2005, p.x). Students use their own experiences and cultural identities to make sense out of texts – to become critical readers. "When students share responses to transactions with the same text, they can learn how their evocations from the same signs differ, can return to the text to discover their own habits of selection and synthesis, and can become aware of, and critical of, their own processes as readers" (2005, p.28).

Transactional Reader Response Theory emphasizes the need to study the impact of a text on its reader, incorporating the connection between a text and a narrative and how the text is the author's creation but the 'true' narrative is what the reader or listener creates, adding personal experiences and perceptions.

Rosenblatt (2005) views reading as holding the reader and the text in a reciprocal relationship.

A text by itself is simply a set of marks or squiggles on a page. These become a sequence of signs as they meet the eyes of a reader. A reader implies someone whose past experience enables him or her to make meaning in collaboration with a text. The reader is engaged in a reciprocal relationship whether it's the first reading or fifth of a text. (p.x)

As well, Rosenblatt discusses how in the reading and writing processes "dialogue between teacher and students and interchange among students can foster growth and cross-fertilization" (p.28). Here I would add to the reading and writing processes the processes of storytelling, story dialogue and story sharing.
Gangi (2004) and Goforth and Spillman (1994) integrate Reader Response work in their arts-based literacy research and practice. Gangi provides further research and teaching ideas for educators wanting to “encounter” literature through the arts, particularly for kindergarten to grade six classes. “Although drama, the visual arts, music, film, storytelling, and dance are disciplines with distinctive content knowledge and processes, they simultaneously offer inviting pedagogical possibilities to help literature come alive” (Gangi, 2004, p.2). Goforth and Spillman (1994) also worked with Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory (1938) to discover how students react to literature and how literature creates a response reaction through oral and written stories, drama, and art.

Reflecting on the theories presented above I took to heart Huberman’s (1995) observation that narratives could be vehicles for personal freedom but were not the key to achieving that emancipation. I noted too that Bruner (1994) questions the validity of stories as family records and observes that our personal stories are interpretations of happenings. In relation to my study, I wondered if sharing stories might allow parents and guardians the opportunity to share something about their lives, and perhaps the opportunity to share a lesson learned. I was also intrigued by Egan’s (1986, 1988, 1997, & 2005) cognitive tools and imagination theories. I wondered if we could draw on cognitive tools to help students empathize and gain further understanding not only with their families but also with their classmates as they shared their stories. It is story’s power to foster community that drew me to Cole’s (1980) work. My study was
further informed by Rosenblatt’s (2005) Reader Response theory as my students used their own stories, and cultural identities, to understand and respond to the stories of their peers while gaining knowledge about their own classroom community. Finally, I was influenced and inspired by Gangi’s (2004) and Goforth and Spillman’s (1994) practice of allowing students to explore creative avenues. However, my chief concern is with the power of storytelling to foster community connections in the classroom.

2.5 Dialogue, Care and Community of Story

How is dialogue linked in my study to ideas about connectedness, care and community? Tannen (1987) relates storytelling to casting a play where dialogue is prominent:

Giving voice to the speech of the people in the story creates a play peopled by characters who take on life and breath. The casting of thoughts and speech in dialogue creates particular scenes and characters, and it is the particular which moves readers by establishing and building on a sense of identification between speaker or writer and audience. (p.71)

Tannen further describes storytelling as a connecting way for people to organize and understand the world and its people. Sharing stories creates spaces for dialogue between the teller and the listener. Polakow (1985, p.164) writes: “In every story there exists a dialectic between teller and listener and at some moment the horizons of telling and listening fuse... and as our lived worlds merge, engagement begets reciprocity and participation in the world of the other and evokes from us the call to act. The educator/researcher as storyteller is a
metaphor for engagement, a call to action**, that can be created in the storytelling classroom, in a community of people willing to participate in dialogue.

As noted previously, a school community has been characterized as a group of people with a common goal of fostering caring relationships where everyone has the chance to grow and learn. Schools provide spaces for community membership and classrooms provide places where the learning is related to cultural discourse and student's experiences and everyday life (Starratt, 1996. p.70). Starratt (1996) also deems that a learning community must be supported by a critical community who supports the enrichment of knowledge through sharing. In creating and maintaining a place of learning community Starratt believes certain processes must be followed: learning takes place in a caring environment; learning involves storytelling; learning is related to home and community; learning should lead to something to the ownership of what is learned; exploration of 'meta-narratives' should be done in order for connections for cultural meaning to occur; and, finally, big questions could be explored (p.71-81). Further, Sergiovanni (1999) identifies building blocks for learning communities. These building blocks encompass a community of relationships, of place, of mind, of memory, and of shared practice (p.17). A classroom only flourishes if there is community. A community only flourishes through connectedness and dialogue.

Banathy and Jenlink (2005) define dialogue as "a culturally and historically specific way of social discourse accomplished through the use of language and verbal transactions. It suggests community, mutuality and authenticity – an
egalitarian relationship” (p.3). I wondered if this egalitarian relationship is evident in the classroom and, if so, in what ways would students express this relationship. I decided to explore the dimensions of dialogue and how connectedness could be achieved with my students.

I was especially interested in how educator and philosopher Martin Buber (1970) described dialogue and in his belief of people’s need for reciprocal relationships. Buber’s interest in a revival of Hasidism prompted his interest in the dialogue of his I/Thou philosophy. (Interestingly, Paley (1999) writes that her mother remembered the importance of the Hasidic practice of storytelling to her childhood.) The I/Thou, or I/You, relationship is only viable when each person is receptive to another, therefore creating reciprocity through dialogical relationship. Buber believes that “all actual life is encounter”. Could this encounter, what Buber calls genuine dialogue between people, happen through sharing of stories? He is a storyteller himself who creates stories to explain ideas and encourages his listeners to discuss his ideas.

Buber uses the word confirmation to mean ‘being present’. When this confirmation includes another person, one can imagine the relationship with this other person. It is through this unity that dialogue can exist. Buber views “a community [as] built upon a living, reciprocal relationship, but the builder is the living, active center” (p.94). A storyteller is an active part of that interacting story and community and perhaps through our collective attempts of teaching we will instil a love of words in our students.
Buber's view of 'attentive silence' as the root of dialogue is a direct connection to storytelling and the listening audience. Alasdair MacIntyre (2002), in dialogue with Joseph Dunne, stated:

Everyone has it in them to become a storyteller and everyone needs to learn how to become a good storyteller and both when and when not to tell a story. Everyone also needs to become a good listener to other people's stories, someone who can tell good storytelling from bad and who knows when to respond to a story and when to keep silent. (p.9)

MacIntyre stresses the importance of connections through narratives: "It is only when students are already at home with a variety of kinds of narrative that they can be expected to see the lives of others and their own lives as embodying narratives" (p.10). Buber often discusses the reciprocity of relation and that it is the only true source of our interactions with each other. "We live in the currents of universal reciprocity" (p.67), according to Buber, which is where stories and storytellers lead us.

Buber views relations as borderless and never ending. In this respect a story too can be seen as relational. As a story is continuously re-told and discussed, it is useful and ongoing. The same can be said about history and the story of the world's people. Buber noticed that history sleeps until it is awoken and relived, or until it is spoken of again. Aidan Chambers (1991), an advocate for reading to children, believes "our taste for reading literature is deeply rooted in this oral experience of story, our need for it, and our understanding of its ways and means" (p.45). This experience of story connects us as community for not only do we share our imaginary experiences, we also encounter and interact with each other.
While speaking of love and the way this connecting force can liberate us to “act, help, heal, educate, raise, [and] redeem”, Buber encourages us to “believe in the simple magic of life, in service in the universe” so we can really encounter every I/Thou relationship (p.66-67). I took from my reading of Buber’s work that stories are created through community where people act on their beliefs, help and heal those in need, educate and raise the youth, and attempt to redeem themselves through their actions. Stories are magical and their tellers can create magic. Stories can also be universal and their tellers can weave their tales in a way all people can understand. Since stories are creations from the heart that are lovingly passed on to others, stories and their tellers are the ethical connections to everyone in our world.

The role of ethics and care in classrooms is important in providing a safe space for all students to feel cared for and be able to create reciprocal relationships. Educational theorist Nel Noddings (1992) envisions educational settings as caring spaces for individuals to meet their unique and full potentials. Her four components for what she calls a moral education are comprised of modeling, dialogue, practice and confirmation. Noddings draws on the ideas of Buber and Freire to establish dialogue as open-ended and genuine without pre-conceived notions of its ending. “Dialogue is a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning” (1992, p.23). Although most traditional stories include endings, the stories themselves should provoke dialogue,
enhanced by both the teller and the audience. For every story, a skilled storyteller must leave their audience with some room for discussion and further interaction, whether the connection is with the character, the setting, or the theme. Stories are also universal, as genuine dialogue is meant to be. Many stories tell tales with positive and negative characters, where one triumphs over his/her weaknesses or fears, and usually where a lesson is learned or questions are asked. Taking Sidorkin’s (1999) idea that “dialogue is an ends; everything else is a means,” the question could be asked: Can the storyteller and the story be a means to dialogue between people?

Noddings refers to Paulo Freire’s (1970) writings on dialogue. Freire writes of the need for love and community building. He views education as liberating and transforming. A legacy of hope is created through words, actions and reflections. Most profoundly Freire (2003) states that “Dialogue cannot exist, however, in the absence of a profound love for the world and for people. The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and re-creation, is not possible if it is not infused with love. Love is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself” (p.89). Noddings (1992) emphasizes “caring as relation” and define caring as “a way of being in relation, not a set of specific behaviours” (p.17). She believes it is important to not tell our students to care, but to model how to care by creating relationships with students and peers. It is with these relations that connections to each other, as well as the curriculum, can occur.

Noddings also invokes the feminist writings of Carol Gilligan. In A Different Voice (1993), Gilligan refers to the importance of narrative at the centre of a
moral life and describes morality as recognizing needs, relation and responses. In her letter to her readers, Gilligan (1993) believes we all have something important to say: “To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act” (p.xv). What I find interesting is her understanding of how responsibility to each other is the heart of relationship. Noddings calls this needs-and response-ethic an ethic of relation that includes reciprocity. Noddings’ ideas imply that stories have to be shared in order to express care for another’s life and livelihood. It is then the responsibility of the storyteller to make the connections needed to show care and maintain relationships through their interactions and stories. It is also the responsibility of the audience to listen intently to the stories and dialogue with each other using the stories as their stepping-stones. Noddings’ concept of confirmation asks us to remain connected with each other, to encourage the best out of the other person. This, she says is genuine dialogue; dialogue that connects each of us to each other and helps us maintain caring relationships.

To make a theoretical connection between dialogue, community and care in my study, I turned to Buber (1970) and Noddings (1992) who also both refer to the term confirmation. Buber describes confirmation as ‘being present’ with another and how this relationship is unified through dialogue. Noddings’ understanding of confirmation draws on our connections with each other through dialogue, which encourage us to sustain caring relationships. Buber discusses the reciprocity of relation and how we need to be present and listen attentively to
each other. He describes love as being essential to encounter genuine dialogue. Noddings describes dialogue as a common quest for understanding, care and empathy. She writes that love is essential to community. In my classroom it is important to strive for understanding and empathy and to aid students in realizing that caring is relational.

2.6 New Literacy Studies

Many advocates of storytelling in the classroom link storytelling to children's literacy. What is missing from much of the advocacy literature on storytelling is a way to link story as a literacy practice to issues of belonging and identity. My search for this link led me to the work of Dyson and Genishi and eventually to an overview of the New Literacy Studies as described by Pahl and Rowsell (2005). The New Literacy Studies provided me with constructs and vocabulary to describe and analyze my data. Terms such as communities of learners and of practice, identity in relation to literacy, the role of power and status in literacy teaching and the idea of a literacy event provide lenses through which to examine literacy work in my classroom. Within the New Literacy Studies teaching and literacy are social practices. Moreover, New Literacy Studies scholars "argue for a critical literacy that envisions literacy as a tool for re-mediating one's relation to the global flows of capital and information" (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.115).

New Literacy Studies is "an approach to literacy and language learning that looks at how literacy is used in everyday life – from literacy events like
guided reading at school, to reading a newspaper in a café” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.156). Pahl and Rowsell (2005) credit a number of researchers with defining the New Literacy Studies approach. “Research from the New Literacy Studies examines literacy practices, and literacy events, and many researchers have used it’s perspective to look at what people do with literacy” (p.11). Scribner and Cole (1981) were among the first to conceptualize literacy practices as situated in different domains. Their study, *The Psychology of Literacy*, is a key text that described literacy practices and different domains of practice for the first time (p.12). Heath’s (1983) work also looks closely at domains, notably home and community space in relation to literacy. Street (1984, 1993), through his work in Iran, “challenged us not to see literacy as a neutral skill, but as a socially situated practice” (p.14).

The construct of literacy artefacts ties my storytelling activities to issues of identity and belonging. Allowing students the freedom to choose their response mode encouraged creativity and discussion between students. In a vignette regarding cultural migrations, Pahl and Rowsell (2005) observe how grade eight English as a Second language students created a project using a multimodal approach and how their greatest sense of satisfaction was in “the opportunity to share it with their families” (p.84).

Living in a multicultural society, characterized as a global village (Marshall McLuhan, 1968), (Canada, or Kanata, actually translates as “the village” in Huron), there is a vast array of knowledge both at home and at school that should be combined and tapped for the benefit of the student. By looking at
"literacy as a social practice", New Literacy Studies looks at both the local and the global and “takes into account our students’ cultural identities” (Pahl & Rowsell, p.76). Luis Moll (1992, 2005) uses “the term funds of knowledge to describe the cultural heritage and concepts parents bring to their children’s literacies” (Pahl & Rowsell, p.54). Moll and his colleagues argue and demonstrate that students’ cultural resources can be used for developing their understandings of the local and global worlds. Moll (2005), along with Norma Gonzalez and Cathy Amanti, conducted an ethnographic study of funds of knowledge based on their first-hand experiences and research from going to visit families and looking at strengths and resources from a pedagogical point of view. Moll (2005) and his colleagues based their theories and research on the premise that “people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge” (p.ix-x). Of relevance to my study and positioning as a teacher-researcher, Moll (2005) notes that he and his co-researchers were not detached observers but had established relationships with the students and families they visited.

In reflecting on negotiating identities within classrooms, Jim Cummins (2001) claims “that empowerment for students results from a collaborative creation of power” relying on the interactions between students and teachers (Pahl & Rowsell, p.88). When the home and the school are working together they are in a dialogic relationship with each other and “each influences the other and speaks to the other, and these voices mix and merge” (Pahl & Rowsell, p.91). Interestingly, the Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence
(CREDE) at the University of California developed five research-based standards for effective pedagogy. These include teachers and students working together to facilitate learning, developing language and literacy skills across the curriculum, engaging students through complex thinking, emphasizing dialogue in the classroom, and making meaning by connecting school to student experiences at home and in the community. These principles for improving teaching practice coincide with the goals I set out with at the beginning of this research study.

2.7 Closing Thoughts

In this chapter I have attempted to highlight professional, research and theoretical literature that informs my study. Undoubtedly there are other ways of conceptualizing my research, but these writers spoke to me. In the next chapter I describe the study itself, the methodology and methods that I employed in constructing what one of my students generously called "that research thing" that "has something to do with stories".
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Perhaps there's another, much larger story behind the printed one, a story that changes just as our own world does. And the letters on the page tell us only as much as we'd see peering through a keyhole. Perhaps the story in the book is just the lid on a pan: It always stays the same, but underneath there's a whole world that goes on – developing and changing like our own world.

Cornelia Funke (2003), *Inkheart*, p.147

3.1 Introduction

My students' enthusiasm and engagement in storytelling activities inspired me to undertake a more systematic study of classroom storytelling pedagogies. I wanted to explore the roles played by particular storytelling activities in nurturing a sense of community in my classroom. As stated already, the purpose of my research was to investigate what happens when students create and collaboratively respond to each other's family stories. I wondered about what themes and commonalities could be found among the students' stories and the responses to each others' stories. I also wanted to see for myself how the positive social connections referred to by so many authors of professional literature were actually made when students shared their stories in my classroom. Here again are the questions I asked:

- When students create and collaboratively respond to each other's family stories, what commonalities exist among the stories and the responses to them?
- What possibilities for dialogue arise out of storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing?
- What positive social connections do students identify in their reflections on the storytelling and response activities?
My interest in the particularities of classroom life led me to adopt a qualitative research approach. Based on Creswell's (1998) collection of definitions, a qualitative approach can be described as a process of investigation that describes an individual's or a community's life or explores problematics associated with a particular person or group at a particular time, or the meanings behind, around and within that social world. Creswell (1998) emphasizes how the researcher working in a qualitative tradition "builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p.15). A qualitative study was a feasible strategy for me as I was free to spend considerable time with the research and the activities in the classroom environment to collect extensive data. I suspected my data would reveal a variety of intricately woven themes and texts. Only qualitative research could allow me to illustrate the complexities and details of the students' interactions, what Geertz (1988) calls 'thick description'. I often found myself not asking "why", as is common with quantitative research, but "how" and "what".

Creswell (1998) also notes that in qualitative research, the guidelines constantly evolve and change. This type of freedom, although daunting for a fledgling researcher, provided me with an opportunity to narrate my findings and engage my reader as I use a first-person narrative style. As a teacher researcher I can emphasize my place as an "active learner" who tells the story from my own view as a member of the classroom community (Creswell, 1998, p.18). However, it is my hope that the research could invite other teachers to contemplate their
own pedagogical practices, in particular their literacy practices, in their own classrooms.

It is through a qualitative case study that I investigated the 'how' and 'what' questions about storytelling, story sharing, story dialogue and the nurturing of a classroom community. In a case study the researcher looks specifically at an individual or small group of participants such as a classroom of students, and draws conclusions only about the small group and only in relation to the context of the study. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) point out: "Any educational setting – a classroom, a school, a family, a community program – is overflowing with human experiences and with human stories" (p.12). A case study describes the collection and presentation of detailed data about a phenomenon being studied within the setting.

In a case study emphasis is placed on exploration and description instead of generalizations or cause-and-effect relationships. For me, adopting a case study methodology allowed me to investigate how a group of students might connect in storytelling activities to become a community of learners.

3.2 Narrative Case Study Methodology

Creswell states that "the overall intent of the case study undoubtedly shapes the larger structure of the written narrative" (1998, p.186). I organized my classroom-based case study as a narrative case study, a decision that seemed, at the time, a natural one since I was writing about storytelling in my classroom and was trying to tell stories about my classroom. Narrative reports serve to
depict the “story” of the case (Creswell, 1998, p.220). Moreover, they “allow researchers to bring together many different analytic elements into a familiar, comfortable form” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.111). However, my decision to create a narrative case study also led to some confusion. Was I writing about storytelling or was I the storyteller? Could I make it work? Could I theorize my data in a story?

In preparing to carry out my study I conducted a brief survey of scholarly literature on the topic of narrative research methodologies.

Riessman’s (1993) chronicles ways in which scholars have defined what encompasses a narrative beginning with Aristotle and his stance that narratives must have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Riessman contends that most scholars find the need for sequencing in a story. Narratives can be chronological (Labov, 1972, 1982), consequential, or thematic; they can be hypothetical or habitual. Each narrative genre has a range of conventional elements.

Mellon (1992) and Denman (1991) discuss the range of story elements and how they are used in storytelling. Literary elements refer to the parts of the story, the plot (the main ideas), characters (the who’s who of the plot), identity (what is it in the narrative that draws us further in? What do we personally connect with in the story?), power and protection (what/what has power; who/what needs or offers protection), storyscapes (settings; where the action takes place), theme (the underlying ideas and topics within the narrative), mood (the feelings conveyed through a narrative), metaphor (a phrase/idea that enables us to see a representation of one thing in terms of another).
Most narrative researchers agree that narratives are interpretative. It is the possibility of multiple interpretations that makes the study of social life as narrative so intriguing, particularly in a classroom where myriad voices are trying to tell their own story or attempting to interpret someone else's story.

Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly's work was especially helpful to my understanding of narrative research methodology. For Clandinin and Connelly (2000), “narrative is the best way of representing and understanding experience… Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively” (pp.18-19). They take John Dewey's transformation of the term 'experience' to look at ways in which the educational understanding of experience is related to both personal and social learning and growth. Each experience in the classroom is built upon a previous experience (p.2). Clandinin and Connelly also draw on Alasdair MacIntyre's work on narrative unity and search for the "links between narrative and life" (p.3). From these theoretical frameworks, Clandinin and Connelly developed their form of *narrative inquiry* where *narrative* is both the phenomenon under study and the method of study. They “see teaching and teacher knowledge as expressions of embodied individual and social stories, and think narratively as [they] enter into research relationships with teachers, create *field texts* (data collection in the field), and write storied accounts of educational lives” (p.4).

Clandinin and Connelly also draw upon researchers who employ “new ways of thinking about changing phenomena and changing inquiry” (p.4) and
have gained insights from researchers in a variety of fields to inform their own narrative inquiries. For example, they note that Geertz identified a need for anthropological narratives, or stories and anecdotes, to provide depth to the photographs and appendixes.

An important quality of narrative methodology is that it can accommodate change. Our cultures, our geographies, our worlds, are in a constant state of change and our stories tend to change with us. Adopting narrative as a research approach allowed me to change the ways in which I viewed my data and presented my findings. Thus, a narrative case study in a school setting can be about more than learning through stories; rather it can be about learning with stories and changing pedagogies.

There are some challenges in using narrative methodologies. Dyson and Genishi (2005) discovered that using a narrative form is not without its problems since researchers and participants alike have different agendas and ideologies as well as differing ideas about the truth of a story. Huberman (1995) writes about struggles with validity narrative inquiry “is so multifold yet at the same time unique that we seem to be corrupting it from the moment we lay our descriptive or analytic hands on it” (p.157). Huberman names two options for handling oral narratives, particularly in the oral history research tradition. One includes creating “methods of description and analysis by which our theories come to correspond more closely to the archetypes or prototypes that lie beneath the richer narratives” (p.158). Another is to collect data and not intrude and not analyze the material, but just let the oral history speak for itself. I personally experienced the
tension expressed in these two solutions and continue to search for some middle
ground. I knew I wanted to shape my narrative of research in order to tell a story,
but I also wanted to let my students’ voices speak “and carry the story through
dialogue” (Creswell, 1998, p.20). In the end I found Dyson and Genishi’s (2005)
description of the case study research structure to be helpful for me as a
graduate student researcher. I therefore followed their advice to identify a case in
the context of my concerns about the importance of dialogue in the classroom
and to formulate research questions that were revisable. I designed my study
“loosely, but not too loosely” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.59) and returned many
times to my original questions. For the reader’s sake, the following account is
tidier than the process it describes.

3.3 Researcher as Teachers

The study was conducted in my grade seven classroom in an Independent
urban elementary school in British Columbia, Canada. At the time of the study,
the class consisted of 29 students between the ages of 12 and 13, one of whom
participated in the class via the internet classroom. My classroom was culturally
diverse (consisting of first-generation Chinese, German, Filipino, Singaporean,
Indian and Russian immigrant families, plus students of Italian, Irish, Chinese,
Filipino, Polish, Dutch and Canadian ancestry). Out of the 29 students, 23
consented to participate in this study.

While contemplating the questions of “how” and “what” in regards to my
ideas about storytelling and community, I concluded that I also wanted to know
how to encourage my students to take an interest in their own stories. I realized I needed the help of the students' families and that by responding to their parents' and guardians' stories perhaps my students could reach out to their peers. I wondered too if responding to family stories could provide the opportunity for my students to express themselves creatively and with meaning. I decided to explore these ideas in greater detail.

It was important to me for the research to be carried out in my classroom. This decision provided a safe, familiar and unstaged place for the students. It also provided the opportunity for me to schedule the activities described below according to daily time constraints, resources, as well as the reception of the students.

Student involvement was voluntary. Although the story-dialogue activities took the form of regular classroom assignments, the students needed to feel free to relate their own story and not base their choice of story on their interpretation of my teacher expectations. Since the students' work was not evaluated students had fewer incentives to present their best work. Luckily, students were engaged with the activities and the purpose of the research and one student who was not involved with the study declared afterwards that he wished he had participated. This research was intended to be a learning opportunity for students and I hoped it could enhance their literacy and communication skills.

As were Dyson and Genishi's teacher-researchers, I am "a person with overlapping identities" with a variety of roles as a researcher and teacher, learning from my students, or participants, in this little section of the community
called a research case (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.58). Being both the researcher as well as the teacher raises a number of issues. I am not a detached observer, but more like the teacher-participant observers in Luis Moll's (2005) "funds of knowledge" study. As one of Moll's teachers observed, I too have a relationship with my students and their families and my goal is to improve my teaching practice (Moll, 2005, 8). I already had a rapport with my students and their families as a teacher in an Independent community school, but I only had a vague idea of every students' home "world" and I thought that focusing on our families and their stories might bring more understanding among our learning community.

Since my research was done during school time and with only a section of the students in my class, the question arose on what the non-participating students would do during our research activity sessions. The five students who did not participate (one of the non-participating students was not attending school during this period of time due to other commitments) still needed to be doing school related work. Therefore, I set up an independent work package for the students to complete during the story-dialogue session. The non-participating students, situated at the back of the classroom so as to not be in the frame of the video camera lens, were invited to watch the story sharing presentations and were also invited to complete a set of reflection questions at the end of the presentations as they were members of our classroom community.

It was important to my research that, as a teacher, the activities I was asking my students to participate in were representative of daily activities
typically carried out in a grade seven classroom (including homework, writing process, partner-sharing, and presentations). It was also important that the activities coincided with the BC grade seven curriculum outcomes. For example, the Language Arts prescribed learning outcomes (1996) include: to develop personal responses by offering reasons for and examples of their judgments, feelings and opinions; to demonstrate pride and satisfaction in using language to create and express thoughts, ideas and feelings through a variety of literacy forms; to elaborate on others’ ideas and encourage participation; and to demonstrate respect for the diversity of peers and of the community.

"Everyday teaching and learning are complex social happenings, and understanding them as such is the grand purpose of qualitative case studies" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.9). What made my classroom and the storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing activities meaningful were the conversations, the dialogue, and the meaning-making that accompanied each activity. As noted by various practitioner researchers (Creswell, 1997; Mello, 2001; Paley, 1979, 1990, 1992, 1995, 1997, 1999; and Rosen, 1988) when teachers trust their students to take educational risks, students tend to respect the quality of their learning more. At each stage of the process, the students had the opportunity to attend and respond to each other, creating more of their stories as they went along.
3.4 The Research Activities

As a teacher I am fascinated by intergenerational learning and so I found Dyson and Genishi's (2005) hypothetical case of "intergenerational learning" involving a young girl named Madlenka and her neighbours very engaging. I wondered if my students could learn from each others' family stories as Madlenka's learned from her neighbours and if my story sharing and responding activities could facilitate students' feelings of belonging to a community.

From March to April of 2006, my students and I were involved in a "Confirmation unit" that culminated in the Confirmation celebration at the beginning of May. Confirmation is one of the initiation sacraments that also symbolizes becoming an adult in the Church. Therefore, not only does my unit of study include the how, why, when, where, what and who of the Confirmation sacrament itself; it also asks students to reflect on their role in the Catholic Church and what their faith means in their lives. After much deliberation about how I could integrate my research goals into the curriculum, I selected the Confirmation unit as a context for research activities. Then, in order to be more inclusive, I expanded the ideas of Confirmation story to include coming-of-age, or adult initiation, events and stories.

After completing the ethical review process and receiving approval from both the participating school principal and school board, I sent home an information letter and consent form to all the parents and guardians of the students in my class. Parents and guardians were invited to contact me regarding this research study. When all consent forms were returned, I then
discussed the storytelling activities in detail with those willing to participate. Each participating student assigned themselves a pseudonym to be used on all written documents pertaining to this study. Students, parents and guardians were also assured that all data in electronic format would be stored in password-protected files on the researcher's computer and that all notes, materials, primary documents and videotape would be used for research purposes only and would also be stored securely.

Student participants took part in one homework assignment (the storytelling), one interactive storytelling session (story-dialogue), and one retelling presentation (story sharing) within the classroom. During the year, my students and I had done considerable work on storymapping, storytelling, and creative presentations. We often used a storymap outline that encouraged students to think about every aspect of storytelling and writing. For example, handouts included space for themes, music, plot, characters, climax, and settings. The homework assignment required the students to ask their parents or guardians about their confirmation or coming of age experiences and record their findings in a storymap format. I also provided an example of a coming of age story about my own Mom. This storytelling assignment was given out on a Friday to be completed by the following Monday. Since parents/guardians were already aware of the study, I believed having a weekend to find time to tell a story would provide adequate time.

On the Monday, every participating student handed in their storymaps or notes for safekeeping until the second part of the activity. Students were also
asked to create their own pseudonyms and decide who would be their partners. Students enjoyed creating their own name and tried out different names with their friends, until I reminded them that the names were supposed to be secret names. Partnerships were also easily created with one group of three deciding to assign responsibilities in a reasonable manner (that is, each of the three was responsible for one story each). These two events provided another opportunity for the students to become excited about the research study process.

This story-dialogue session took place two days later, lasted over one hour, and was videotaped. It included students partnering with another student and orally relating their parents’ or guardians’ story. Like Rosen (1988), I wanted to empower my students by providing the space for them to retell their life narratives. In turn, each student told their story and then created a response to their partner’s story. Some students used the storymapping sheets while others took notes. Students were then given independent time to develop their ideas. Next, students were invited to share ideas with their partners and with other groups in order to facilitate development of ideas and to recruit others into their presentations. Students were then invited to complete a reflection sheet asking what they learned about their partner as well as about storytelling.

The story sharing presentations, which were carried out over two days, consisted of participant’s creative interpretation of their partner’s story. The presentations were videotaped. The class was then invited to reflect on their involvement in the activities through written reflections and a group dialogue.
Students also wrote letters to each other regarding their partnership and the effect on them of the presentations.
Table 1: Outline of Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity session</th>
<th>Time Span</th>
<th>What did the students do?</th>
<th>What did I do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td>assigned Friday; due Monday</td>
<td>Students asked their parents or guardians for a story about a Confirmation or coming-of-age event (an adult initiation story); stories had to be written down on storymaps or in note form.</td>
<td>On Friday, I introduced the topic assignment (with examples) and discussed the Monday deadline; On Monday, I collected all the storymaps and notes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-dialogue</td>
<td>Tuesday; half hour</td>
<td>Students were asked to choose partners and assign themselves pseudonyms.</td>
<td>I recorded partnerships and pseudonyms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-dialogue</td>
<td>Wednesday; one hour work period</td>
<td>Students shared their parent’s/guardians’ story with their partner, took notes on the story, discussed and responded to the original story, began creating their response story, and shared their ideas with fellow classmates. Students were also asked to complete an individual reflection sheet. Students had to complete their response story by the following Tuesday – they were given some class time for this.</td>
<td>I facilitated the work period by answering questions, listening to stories, and observing the students. Students were videotaped during this session. I collected the reflection sheets at the end of the period. I also had to allow for class time for students to complete their response stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story sharing</td>
<td>Following Tuesday to Thursday</td>
<td>Students presented their response stories (in songs, dramatic skits, poems, stories, and a research study). One student gathered her research data on the Tuesday and presented her findings on the Thursday. Students were also asked to reflect individually and cooperatively on the presentations as well as the other activities.</td>
<td>This period was also videotaped. I asked the students to volunteer to present and made certain that everyone had an opportunity to present their story. I collected the presentation notes or stories if possible. I also collected the reflection sheets completed by the students individually and cooperatively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5 Teacher as Researcher: Assignments as Data

The primary sources of my study were field notes, video recordings, individual and group written reflections, storymaps and notes created by the students, and, the students' final picture books, drama scripts, poems, research notes and written stories. I created field notes before, during and after the study and used my reflections on the field notes as the foundation for my data. My notes were organized in a double-entry journal format where observations were recorded on one page and my reflections on the observations were recorded on the opposite page. The students' presentations and the work period were recorded on videotape. The students were not accustomed to being videotaped during their work periods, although presentations were sometimes taped. This created some excitement with the students, and sometimes some speechless moments, but it was also understood by the students and myself that the information from this session would be important to the study. As a student who called herself Lindsay aptly stated, "Don't be afraid if a camera or someone is watching you, say what you have to say and don't act weird!" Lindsay and Madison also noted: “We thought this activity was fun because we got to perform in front of the video camera.” The hard copies (primary documents) of the students' story ideas as well as the finished products were also collected. Students were invited to discuss the activities during videotaped sessions during their work periods. Students were asked to complete a reflection sheet and a Think-Pair-Share reflection activity in response to such questions as: What did you learn from your partner and their story? What did you learn about
storytelling? Students were also given the opportunity to submit their own thoughts and ideas about this experience. Following Spradley (1979), I employed ethnographic methods and recorded my students' reflective answers and questions, presentations, and stories verbatim. My oral and written questions were of a spiralling nature in order to draw questions from answers and answers from other questions. "In ethnographic interviewing, both questions and answers must be discovered from informants" (Spradley, 1979, p.84). In arranging my data I studied each of the activities and chunked the responses and stories according to patterns or themes.

3.6 Analyzing the Data

In order to analyze and transform my data into findings, I referred to Dyson and Genishi’s (2005) and Creswell’s (1998) advice for beginning researchers. I looked at my data according to “its inductive and reflective character” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p.79). Dyson and Genishi caution the researcher against making “neat narratives”: “Through analysis we are not on the trail of singular truths, nor of overly neat stories. We are on the trail of thematic threads, meaningful events, and powerful factors that allow us entry into the multiple realities and dynamic processes that constitute the everyday drama of language use in educational sites” (p.111).

Creswell (1998) encourages making a detailed description of both the case and its setting. He presents two ways of obtaining meaning from the research: categorical aggregation where “the researcher seeks a collection of
instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge” and direct interpretation where “the case study researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it without looking for multiple instances” (p.154). I chose to include a collection of instances from which to observe emerging meanings (i.e. reflection questions, videotaped work and presentations, story maps, and hard copy stories). I then asked myself what relationships and patterns could be found among my data’s categories.

I noted themes in the students’ retellings of their parents’ and guardians’ stories that were restated in the partner’s stories. I also traced transformations in the stories, instances where the theme remained the constant but other elements in the story were transformed in the partner’s presentation. During the students’ work period and presentations, I studied the interactions of the students, how they communicated with each other, what their body language showed, how they demonstrated engagement in the tasks, and how they portrayed empathy and care towards each other.

The students’ reflection responses provided the students an opportunity to think individually and then cooperatively about what these activities brought to the classroom, to their families, and to themselves. The individual reflection questions asked after the story-dialogue activity included: What did you learn about your partner? And, what did you learn about storytelling? After the story sharing presentations, students were individually asked to respond in writing to the following questions: What surprised you? What amazed you? What did you learn from your partner’s story? And, what would you like to say about this
experience? In pairs, students were then asked to create a poster based on the following questions: What was fun about this activity? What did you learn about storytelling? What did you like about working in pairs on stories? What did you like about working with your parents? After all the presentations were done and the students had a few days to think about the events, I asked them to write letters to their story partners. These letters were copied and given to the partner to keep.

3.7 Representing the Data

According to Dyson and Genishi (2005) "analytic work is concretely reflected not only in what we choose to transcribe, but also in how we choose to represent our data on the printed page" (p.72). I attempted to present my data as a mixture of my story and the students' stories and reflections. While answering my research questions, I organized my data in three sections. I wanted the stories, responses and reflections to show the commonalities and the contrasts among the stories, as well as the evolution of dialogue and community around the creation of the stories.

3.8 Ethical Issues

A key ethical issue for me relates to the qualitative researcher's need to engage in member checking. Citing Stake (1995), Creswell describes how a case study also involves extensive verification that depends on the contestability of the description. This can be done by triangulation of data, a search for the
convergence of information, and by 'member checking', a process through which participants examine the representations of their words or actions in the researcher's account. What students will say during member checking activities is, however, undoubtedly influenced by the teacher’s authority and existing relationships with the participants and their families.

A second issue relates to students' decisions not to participate. I explained my research plans in oral and written formats to my students and then handed them a package to take home with them. The home package included an information letter and a consent form to be signed and returned. The consent form had participating and non-participating options and had to be returned whether parents wanted their children to participate or not. I believed that their return of a signed form meant that parents had read and understood the information, but non-participating students told me they were not involved for two reasons. For two students, language and cultural barriers prevented some parents and students from thoroughly understanding the research topic, theme and reasoning, for the other three students the reason was that they did not want to complete an extra homework assignment. After witnessing the activities, three out of the five students, two of the extra homework group and one from the cultural barrier group said that they would participate in a similar research study if the chance presented itself again. If I decide to undertake another classroom-based study, I would, if possible, translate the parent information letter into the necessary languages and invite parents to a meeting in order to explain the study and provide them with the opportunity to ask questions.
Perhaps the most challenging ethical issue for this study was my involvement as both the researcher and the teacher. Our school is a community, not just of learners, but of families and friends who care about each other. I had an established rapport with my students and their families. I speculated that this was why so many of my students and families were willing to participate in a study that touched such a personal aspect of their lives. I wondered if some parents would have participated if they had not known me already.

Being a teacher-researcher made me very aware of power issues in my classroom too. As a teacher-researcher I was able to be more spontaneous than I would have been as an outsider in my research site. However, the need for time management and for activities to be completed on my schedule raise questions about my use of teacher authority for research ends. An outsider researcher would not have had the authority to insist that participants accommodate their needs in that way.

What the non-participating students would do during research activities also presented me with an ethical and a practical challenge. During the activities described above, those students were given previously designed independent study work, were situated away from the video camera lens so as to not be taped, and were also invited to watch the final story presentations and offer reflections. I believed that since the students were also part of our classroom community it was important for them to join in on the fun of seeing creative presentations by their peers.
3.9 Validity and Generalizations

In order to increase validity, care was taken to describe the activities and data accurately and completely by presenting what I did, said, thought and studied as a researcher as well as what the participants did, said, reflected, and created. I used a well-established case study methodology and drew on theories associated with studies similar to mine to inform my research questions. I paid close attention to all data and collected multiple forms of data from multiple sources.

Creswell (1998, p.154) claims that "naturalistic generalizations" can be made from analyzing the case study data ("generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or for applying it to a population of cases"). But as I studied the generational stories of individual students in a particular school community, as well as their participation and creative responses to each other, I realized that I could not comment on how community develops in any other grade seven class. As Dyson and Genishi (2005) explain, a case study is a study of an entity that exists in a particular place and time and that can "blur boundaries" (p.120) for generalizing findings. Therefore I did not assume that someone who used my strategies would also see the positive outcomes I saw. According to Dyson and Genishi (2005),

there is no assumption that teaching methods per se are causal; indeed, particular teaching approaches that work in one setting may not work in another... and those that work with one child may not work with another. Both teachers and students bring interpretive frames that influence their ways of attending and responding to others within the social activities of the classroom. (pp. 11-12).
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

"Still, I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales. We're in one, of course; but I mean: put into words, you know, told by the fireside, or read out of a great big book with red and black letters, years and years afterwards. And people will say, 'Let's hear about Frodo and the Ring!' And they'll say: 'Yes, that one of my favorite stories.'"


4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I attempt to tell the story of my study. Readers will be familiar with the story so far. It was after lunch on a slightly overcast late spring day when twenty-eight grade seven students tumbled back into our classroom. As happened most days after the lunch period the students were aware we all read silently and independently for about twenty minutes (more if I was at a really good part in my book). So, about ten students started to read, two tackled the interesting smell coming from the fish tank, five started to chat (perhaps about their lunchtime soccer game, or what movie they were going to see that weekend, or, maybe, about the books they were reading), and the rest of the class searched for their long-lost library book, a much needed item in their desk, or perused the classroom library hoping for a 'good' book.

Eventually, everyone began reading, mostly independently, until someone said, "Hey, aren't we supposed to be doing that research thing today? It has something to do with stories, right?" And, that was the end of our silent reading time.
“So, what's it about?” asked Olgoo.

“I want you to tell us a story. Not a story that you've read or one that pops into your head, but a story about your family,” I replied.

“A funny story about when I was a kid?” asked Aragorn.

“Although we would enjoy that, that's not the kind of story this time. How about a story told to you by one of your parents or guardians?” I asked.

“Would we have to talk to them?” asked a few students, sceptically.

“It would be a good idea.” I answered.

During the next half hour I explained to the class what participating in my research project would entail. Although there were a few moans regarding the homework, most students were excited about asking their parents and guardians for a story, especially a story that might cast their parents as kids. I also told the class a story about my Mom traveling to London with her aunt and buying her first pair of high heeled shoes; a coming-of-age story demonstrating responsibility about being away from home and including a symbol of adulthood. I also told a story about my own Confirmation and how, as a class, we had made symbolic stoles. Mine included a dove and my Confirmation name.

The students' responses to the activities were positive and at times overwhelming. I had too much data. What to do with it? I began by sorting. Following Paley and Rosen, I then attempted to reconstitute my analysis as a story. I was not entirely successful – with the result that there are two voices in this chapter: an academic voice and a storied voice. However, I have tried to
include my students’ voices and to use the words they used – and to celebrate their stories.

4.2 What Commonalities Exist among Stories?

Fourteen of the twenty-three stories were not related to Confirmation, but told instead a "coming-of-age" story. The settings of the stories were places as diverse and distant as the Philippines, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, China, Russia, Singapore, Newfoundland, Edmonton and a variety of places in British Columbia. However, I observed many commonalities among them. Understandably, the commonalities include: growing up and being responsible; work responsibilities; becoming closer to God through Confirmation; and, marking celebrations of growing up.

My mother’s life was different when she was a kid. There was no formal age in which she became an adult, but she says that once she was able to cook and clean, she was an adult. It was different back then, since her family lived in a village. The kids basically took care of themselves and that was technically their path into adulthood.

Corina

Growing up and accepting responsibility are themes that appeared in more than half of the stories. John described how when he was born, his mother had to be in her bed most of the time and his father and grandmother looked after him. But, one day, his father and grandmother went out and John needed his diaper changed. At first his mother cried because she did not know what to do, but then she realized how she alone had to take responsibility for her child. Frederick’s and Carmelo’s moms went to school on their own and took care of themselves. Carmelo related how his mother had to be organized to take a boat
from home to school. Carmelo’s mom told him that surviving in the big city was “like the first time driving a manual car”. It was hard at first, until you figured out how to manoeuvre yourself. She also thought college was a bigger challenge because the closeness she had with classmates in elementary and high school was not there and she had to be responsible for herself.

Feelings about loss of community when first entering adulthood are also present in stories about first jobs.

When my dad was fourteen he had an apprenticeship at a butchering factory and store. He remembers my grandmother saying to him, “No matter the economy, people will always have to eat”. My dad would take a bus to the factory every Sunday evening and returned to his parents’ home every Saturday with a paycheck. In his first week, his boss, Heinrich, told him to paint all the machines. This took him almost all of his first week because there were so many machines. Painting them taught him about how they worked and how they turned little fat animals into sausage and beef. My dad worked there for three years and by the end of the first year he was able to buy a motorcycle.

Armando

Responsibility for oneself and for others was another aspect evident in the stories and responses. My students were amazed at how young parents were when they went to work on their own. Aimee told about her dad working as a mechanic in Edmonton when he was eighteen and then returning to Burnaby every two months to live with his parents. Other stories also included traveling (to Saudi Arabia) and working to help out family in Hong Kong. Armando’s story was interesting because not only did it teach a lesson of how to work hard and be responsible but, in the end, Armando’s dad was able to get two tangible things out his experience: an apprenticeship and a motorcycle.

My father heard about the apostles being blessed with the Holy Spirit by tongues of fire above their heads and thought this would happen at
Confirmation. Expecting to receive a tongue of fire above his head, my father waited through the mass ... but did not get one above his head. He was disappointed. The next morning, he received the tongue of fire in an unusual way, he woke up with a fever!

William

In the Confirmation inspired stories the theme of growing closer to God was prevalent. Although not all the stories were as humourous as William’s, the Confirmation stories spoke of excitement and anticipation. Two spoke of their sponsors guiding and helping them become closer to God. Many students told stories where their parent was fearful of the Bishop or of God with the understanding that their fear was actually the fear of growing up and having to take on responsibilities. Still, many of the stories had aspects of celebration and gathering of friends and family.

It was my mom’s 16th birthday and my grandmother had rented the church hall to have a party. They made sure everything was perfect, because you only turn 16 once! There were games, music, food and drinks and everyone had a great time. At mass, before the party, something changed at communion time. As the host was handed to my mom, a special comforting feeling exploded through her. It was as if God was here wishing her “Happy Birthday” personally. This was the greatest gift of all, the unforgettable moment above all. This feeling was growing up and knowing God would always be with you.

Erin

The stories of celebration took on two forms, three involved coming-of-age parties when the moms turned sixteen, and the rest were about Confirmation parties. While Erin’s story about her mom’s birthday party encompassed both the celebration and the closer to God themes, Olgee’s story centered on how another culture symbolized adulthood. When Olgee’s mother turned sixteen she was given a party by her own mother and a silver ring, and as was required custom in Russia, she was presented with her internal passport. Interestingly, not
many of the stories spoke of symbolic representations of becoming an adult except for Olgee's and in hers she spoke of both the ring and the passport. Perhaps the symbolism of the celebrations represents a coming-of-age, much like a coming-out party.

Benny's response poem to Micky's guardian's Confirmation story concluded with this stanza:

After the confirmation came to an end,
They all went to Mama Rosa's to congratulate.
That is when Mike felt like he was embracing a new trend,
Everyone was also there to celebrate. Benny

Many Confirmation ceremonies ended with a party. Most rented the Church hall and family and friends joined in the “special” celebration. They all spoke of the amount of food and the music, while two of the stories included being given presents and money. Tali shared with his audience how in the Italian tradition at Confirmation celebrations not only are the Confirmands given presents and money but everyone is given a gift at the end of the party. Fiona's story entailed the realities of living in a small B.C. community and how the bishop could only come out to do Confirmation ceremonies every three years. Fiona's mother remembered having the same dress as her cousin and attending a dinner party at her aunt's house. Overall, celebrating with family and friends connected people and produced many vivid memories.

The celebrations also taught lessons. Erin's mother remembered wanting to have a party for her sixteenth birthday but was surprised by her parent's decision to go to Church instead. Of course, after going to Church, where Erin's
mother sat fuming, Erin’s grandparents took her mom over to the Church hall where “a surprise greeted her. She saw all her friends there. There was a big party going on for her! Erin’s mom then realized something. She had treated her parents badly lately. She went to them hugging them. She also realized that God was always with her.”

In retelling their family stories, students sometimes created artefacts that they presented to the class. After hearing Blake’s story about his mother’s Confirmation, Frederick decided to write and illustrate a children’s picture book based on the fear of going through the Confirmation ceremony. He changed the gender of the characters, including cartoon-like creatures and humorous backgrounds to present his point and created a new character – Bob the Blob.

There once was a blob named Bob. Now this year was a special year for Bob, because this was the year Bob got initiated as a true blob. Normally all of the blobs getting initiated were excited; initiated blobs were treated with great respect in the blob community. The only thing Bob had problems with was the blob bonk.

The blob bonk echoes the much-told story of the Confirmation ‘slap on the cheek’. There is a sort of urban legend among Confirmation candidates that when you are Confirmed with the Holy Spirit, the Bishop slaps your face to represent ‘waking you up to your new responsibilities’ as an adult in the Church. Now, perhaps this event did happen at one time (although no one I spoke to actually saw it happen) but the fear has been perpetuated through generations of grade seven students, perhaps with a little encouragement from a Confirmation preparation teacher or two.

When the day of the blob initiation ceremony was upon Bob he started to freak out. Bob was jumpy, running in fear of anything that touched him.
When it was time for the blob bonk to be performed on Bob he started to cry. The head blob asked if Bob was ready and with an encouraging word from Michelle, Bob nodded. And so the blob bonk was performed. After the blob bonk Bob started to laugh. It didn’t hurt at all! The blob bonk didn’t hurt anymore than a light poke. With his fear behind him Bob partied the night out and became a true blob.

His fellow students laughed along with the silly antics of Bob the Blob and agreed that there wasn’t anything to be afraid of during the Confirmation ceremony. Frederick even remarked that they would all be alright at the ceremony because they would be there together and with their families.

One student, Madison, used the opportunity of participating in a research study to do her own investigation. Her partner, Lindsay, told a story that also reminded her of the urban legend described above. Lindsay’s story involved her mother’s fear and excitement at being confirmed. “Confirmation was coming up and she was starting to get nervous and almost scared of bringing her faith to a new level. She was also scared of coming closer to God.” At the end of her story Lindsay had recorded that her mother, now that she was grown up, “realized that it was silly to be afraid to be closer to God.”

“Umm, I have this idea,” remarked Madison, coming up to my desk.

“What are you thinking?” I replied. We had just finished our story-dialogue session.

“I think I’d like to do a thesis for my presentation,” Madison said quietly, “What do you think?”

“I think that’s a great idea! What are you going to do?” I asked excitedly.

“Well, Lindsay’s mom’s story was about how she was nervous and almost scared of being Confirmed and getting closer to God. She realized at the end that it was silly to be scared,” said Madison passionately, “I think a lot of my friends feel the same way. I’d like to do a survey of how many people are scared to be Confirmed and why.”
“Why don’t you ask everybody tomorrow. Did you want them just to tell you or do you want them to write their answers down? You can use the side white board to post your question if you’d like,” I said. “How are you going to present what you find out?”

“Okay, I’ll write the question, ‘Are you scared about Confirmation’, on the board. I think everybody should write down their answers. It’ll be easier to put together that way. Can I just type something up and tell the class what I found out?” asked Madison.

“That’s perfect! Now, we’re both doing a research project!”

Ms. Doyle-Jones

Madison’s response included a retelling of the original story in her own words, her methods of obtaining her research, a discussion and a conclusion.

This is what she concluded:

When I asked my classmates if they felt the same way as Lindsay’s mom did, some said they were nervous some said they weren’t scared of being close to him but they were scared of the responsibility of bringing their faith to a new level. Like some people said it doesn’t mean that we don’t love him [God]. I think Lindsay’s mom was scared because she and us are making the decision ourselves to let him into our lives and protect us.

Madison

The students also wrote letters to their partners a few days after the final presentations. Lindsay’s and Madison’s correspondence is as follows:

Dear Lindsay,
Your mom’s letter inspired me in a way because she had doubts when she was younger about being closer to god. But today she is now a strong Catholic who passed her faith onto her children. My auntie was a strong Catholic as a child but did not baptize her kids and does not practice her religion any longer. So that was strong of your mom to do what she did!
Yours truly, Madison

Dear Madison,
Hi, your story was very interesting. My favorite part was when you took 1 idea from the story, which was when my mom was scared of being Confirmed. Not only you mentioned a part, you examined it and brought it to the class’s attention, and asked them if they were scared. Based on all
of that, you showed me that you understood my story, and made it a fun activity!
Sincerely, Lindsay

These two letters are also representative of what the other student letters had to say. Erin's letter to Corina is as follows:

Dear research partner, Corina,
It was a very fun experience working with you. Your story was a great example of how an everyday person works hard, to achieve their goals. Your story could be a very inspiring story to people who need a little inspiration. My story about my mother was also a very inspiring story. It showed achievements, and hard work... It was fun comparing the similarities of our stories. We both agreed it was fun working with our parents, so we could also talk about what we learned from this experience. I enjoyed your story based on my story... It's been a pleasure working with you, and good job on your work.
Your research partner, Erin

These excerpts from students' responses show that students were furthering their understandings of their friends and peers as well as their families and the families of their friends and peers. They gained insights into their own feelings and realized that others, both young and older, shared the same feelings about growing up and meeting new challenges and responsibilities.

4.3 What Contrasts are Evidenced among Stories

Sixteen of the stories were told to the students by their mothers and seven by their fathers. Not surprisingly, out of the twenty-three stories, eleven were about mothers while six involved fathers. However, four stories were about friends and roommates, seven involved family, two were about co-workers, and three involved clergy and Confirmation sponsors as main characters. A range of themes was evident in the stories. Some students spoke of death of friends, a
mom being attacked, a woman working to support her family and send her brothers to university, working in a foreign country, and traveling independently.

Possibly one of the most heartfelt stories was Madison’s story of her mom losing her two best high school friends in a drinking and driving accident. Here is Madison’s story as interpreted by Lindsay:

For Madison’s mom, parties come and go. One day she was excited to be invited to a party (hosted by her dad!). Everyone was going to be there. She thought the best part was she would be able to go with her two best friends, Steven and Fred. Now, normally she would wear jeans and a top but instead she bought a white and pink dress and she got her hair done. She phone Steven and Fred to pick her up for the party. But at the party there were people drinking. Unfortunately, the people were drinking and driving. When they were walking across the street and onto the sidewalk, Steven and Fred were hit by a car driven by a drunk driver. Unfortunately they died two days later.

Lindsay

When Lindsay read her story interpretation of this story, there was silence in the room. It was evident from the sad looks on their faces that the students could empathize with Madison’s mom and her loss. Madison’s mom made it clear that she told the story to her daughter because she wanted her to know “that there really are drunk drivers and bad people out there. She learned to be more careful and not to make the mistakes her friends did. What happened made her feel closer to God.” I wondered if the retelling had a similar impact on Madison’s classmates.

Many of the stories spoke of the hard trials of life, such as starting working at a young age and losing close friends, but one story in particular contained a shocking story of violence. Frederick’s mom told him about the time she went to university and was living on her own for the first time:
Unfortunately my mom’s dad died in the war while she was away at university. But that instead of making her weak, made her stronger. While at college some drunk guys came into her house uninvited so she fended them off with a machete.

Frederick

While the story itself is upsetting, I noted that the class did not feel the need to discuss the violence at any length. Could this be because Frederick did not make a big deal out of his story? Even his partner, Blake, appears to trivialize the violence in his song:

Frederick’s mom
was going to the dorm
she went to college
when two drunk men were on a rage
Frederick’s mom
got a giant machete ta-bum
she went to Canada
where everybody says eh.

Blake

During the presentation of his song, Blake recruited two of his friends to act out the parts of Frederick’s mom and the attacking men. Afterwards the class clapped loudly. Was this because Frederick’s mom was able to defend herself or because of the actors’ performance? I overlooked an opportunity to initiate some discussion surrounding violence in young people’s lives and global social inequities.

The only story that explicitly stated the inequalities and power struggles for women was Mandy’s story about her mother. I was walking by when I heard Mandy relate her story to her partner, Kiki.

“Here’s my story,” said Mandy, “When my mom finished high school she went to Hong Kong to work in a bank. It was at that very moment she felt grown up. She felt like an adult because when she was little she wasn’t allowed to go anywhere by herself, not even in high school. But after that
day she could. My mom practiced how to count money and how to work in
customer service. Every two weeks she was paid and gave the money to
her mom for safe keeping. She felt happy because her brothers and sister
didn't have money to bring home because they were in university...

Mandy paused.

“Well, her brothers were in university,” she finished.

When I heard Mandy reading her story to her partner it appeared to be a coming-
of-age story about a first job. But Mandy paused when she spoke about her aunt
and uncles going to university and then restated how it was only her uncles who
actually went to university, not the girls. Mandy was not ashamed of the fact, she
said it very matter-of-factly with a slight smirk. Mandy obviously realized that
there was a problem with only the boys attending post-secondary education. But,
at the same time, I inferred from the tone of her voice that she was very proud of
her mother for supporting herself and her family. Surprisingly, her partner, Kiki,
did not mention this inequity in her response poem. Kiki’s poem focused on how
people need to make money, although she did mention how money does allow
you to gain an education:

...Money can come, and it can go
It can give you friends, and it can give you foes
Money can’t buy you love that is true
But it can buy things that we love to use
I enjoy money, and I bet you do too
It buys me food, a house, education, a ride
Though some say it isn’t everything, we all need money to survive.

Kiki

In her partner letter to Kiki, Mandy wrote: “I thought our stories were similar, like
they both felt grown up when they found a job. Our partnership was good
because we let one another speak instead of interrupting each other. We listened
very well. I was kind of surprised when we both did something about learning the value of money."

Kiki was also told an unusual story and Mandy created a picture book telling of Kiki’s dad’s first job in Saudi Arabia and his discovery of a different culture.

My dad’s first job out of college was in Saudi as a telecommunications technologist. There, he learned the strict culture, adjusted to a different life and culture, and learned the value of money. It was very hot and he didn’t know the language. He led a very simple life. He learned to be patient and how to survive in the desert. He was able to appreciate life the simple way.

Kiki

During the story-dialogue session, Kiki and Mandy were working beside Armando, Carmelo and Manu and the two groups could hear each other. As Kiki related her story to Mandy, Manu became interested in what she was saying and this sparked a conversation between them about Saudi Arabia. Both students’ families are from the Philippines but they realized that both their fathers had worked in Saudi Arabia at one time. Manu had actually been born there. Without this storytelling interaction these two students might not have realized the connection.

While Kiki’s dad worked and lived in a country with a different culture than his own, Felicity’s mom experienced a different culture as a traveler. Both stories present the challenges of doing something independently as an adult. Felicity’s story involved her mom’s first steps of independence, while having fun:

After months of people telling her how great California and Mexico were she knew she had to go. My mom had always wanted to go but her family couldn’t afford it. So, she saved her money and went to Disneyland, North Beach and Tijuana with her best friend, Cheryl, even though her own mom
wasn't so sure. She felt like a true adult because she paid for all her own expenses and was able to afford it all with no help from her parents. But what made her really feel awesome was when she was able to bargain for an outfit, purse and necklace in Tijuana without knowing the language.

Felicity

In this story, Felicity's mom used her savings to go on a trip with her best friend after they graduated from high school. Felicity's mom was able to overcome a language barrier (like Kiki's dad) and managed to look after herself without her parents. During both the story-dialogue and story sharing activities this story inspired other students to relate similar stories about traveling to distant lands when they "were older" and how they were going to manage independently. Perhaps Felicity's mom inspired the students to start saving their money.

It appears that the contrasting themes in the student's original stories and their story responses created opportunities for dialogue throughout the activity sessions. To what extent did we take up opportunities? My analysis suggests that it was not as easy as I had anticipated to recognize the spaces for critical conversations about social inequities and gender issues that opened up during the story sharing and story dialogue sessions. Recognizing such opportunities would appear to require some time to engage in focused reflection and teacher facilitation. Perhaps these activities could be the starting point for further study and critical discussion about power and social justice issues. However, I did note numerous instances of students forming positive social connections with classmates.
4.4 Creating Spaces for Dialogue

The story-dialogue and story sharing activities elicited a variety of discussions and opportunities for students to connect with each other and with their family stories, thereby transforming the classroom community. Students not only learned more about each other they also learned something about themselves. Erin “learned that everyone has something in their life that is a big part of growing up” while, as Aimee said, even “something as little as a confirmation can be very interesting. I also learned that it can be very hard to explain a story that is not about yourself”. Students were engaged in each others' work. They listened to each other attentively (Buber, 1970), they did not move around but stayed with their partner, discussing and learning with each other. For example, Felicity raptly “Ohh’d” and enthusiastically asked questions of her partner.

When the afternoon of story-dialogue arrived I barely had time to organize all the pairs, and the group of three, before some of the students were already exchanging their stories. It was amazing to me how quickly the students went to work, much more quickly than with most other activities. Students remained on task throughout the session and were engaged by the activity as shown by their enthusiasm, intent listening, and constant discussion, laughter, questions and answers regarding their stories. Even when some of the groups (notably Aragorn and Tali) were finished exchanging their stories and writing down notes, they began their creative work for their presentations without disturbing other groups by straying from the task.
During the story-dialogue work session, two of the Confirmation stories prompted a dialogue among a few of the pairs of students regarding gifts and outfits for the ceremony.

“When my dad was Confirmed my grandparents had a big party in the Church hall,” began Tali, “There was a band and everyone danced and had some of the giant congratulations cake. He got a lot of money and presents. Because we’re Italian, it’s tradition that dad gave everyone a gift at the end of the party. He had fun and thanked everyone for coming, but he was so tired he fell asleep right after everyone left.”

“Gifts just for going to the party? Excellent!” repeated many of Tali’s classmates.

“Yeah, I’m also getting a gold chain for my Confirmation,” Tali said.

“Me too!” replied his partner, Aragorn.

“My mom is giving me a cross that her mom gave her,” stated Aimee.

“Nice, my mom’s taking me to get my hair done,” said Fiona.

This dialogue continued for quite some time, involving more and more students as they discussed the material side of being Confirmed. To borrow from Rosenblatt’s (2005) Transactional Reader Response Theory, Tali’s peers appeared to take his story and used their own experiences and cultural identities to be in dialogue together. While this discussion ensued, Aimee was recruiting fellow classmates for her dramatic skit based on Fiona’s mom’s story and getting them organized at the front of the classroom.

“Okay, now this is about Fiona’s mom’s Confirmation,” Aimee began, “Fiona’s mom was scared but that’s not the best part – her mom and her mom’s cousin wore the same dress!”

“What!” a chorus of girls yelled out.

“I’ve got to ask your mom about this, Fiona!” commented Felicity.
“Uh huh,” Aimee said as she directed them into a line, “so, we’re going to do the Confirmation ceremony. Lindsay could you be the Bishop? And, then Fiona, as her mom, and me, as the cousin, are going to fight about the dresses!”

“Excellent,” said Fiona, amidst a roar of laughter from the actors.

What ensued was a hilarious rendition of a tranquil Confirmation ceremony and a dress-pulling fight between the two cousins over their outfits. Everyone laughed hysterically, particularly the actors, and the scene ended with the two cousins hugging and going off to the party that had been organized in their honour. I learned later that these two events had sparked further connections and dialogue among the families.

At the end of the story-dialogue session, students reflected and responded to what they shared. The majority of the students voiced how much fun they had. Fiona realized that “storytelling not only tells you a story. The story always ends up teaching you something new” while Madison discovered that “If we didn’t have stories we wouldn’t be able to learn things – like Lindsay’s mom taught me that at first she was scared but after she was happy – so stories help you learn by people’s mistakes.”

Yannah’s statement, “Sometimes it’s hard to tell a story, but it’s really fun to see how your friend reacts”, summed up the tone of the classroom that afternoon. Moreover, the laughter and talking continued into the next session in which the students presented their stories.

Tremendous amounts of laughter were particularly coming from Micky and Benny’s area during their work session, so much so that they could barely talk. Micky said he was surprised at how much fun they had even though they were
doing work. Perhaps it was Micky's story about his guardian's Confirmation that caused some of the frivolity. His partner Benny retold his story in a poem:

Luigi and Carmel, the parents of Mike,
Got to choose Mike's godfather for his special day.
They picked his Uncle Tom, whom they very much liked,
Tom played in the NFL who better than okay.

Mike in front Tom behind,
They couldn't fit down the aisle side by side.
The Bishop chuckled but was kind,
They went on and didn't hide.

In their partner letters to each other, Micky and Benny had similar things to say:

Dear Micky,
We had some really good times telling our stories, eh? ...I liked how we were really loud compared to the other groups... It was really fun to work with you and I had a really good time. I think we have a good bond which helped our parts along. I hope we can be partners in a lot of other things.
Sincerely, Benny

Dear Benny,
I loved working on this project with you. I know we have a strong bond. That bond made this project that much funner. I also loved how you and Aragorn sung that song about my uncle. Now I know more about your mom and you. I think you are the best partner a friend could have, and I'm glad you were my partner.
Micky

Students continued to be engaged in the activity even when various groups were at different stages. They asked each other questions about how their response sounded and if their peers would join them in presenting their stories. Much laughter erupted during the presentations as some students acted and sang some of the responses. The group of three boys, Carmelo, Armando and Manu, were particularly enjoying themselves as they presented their songs as a rap group. During the story sharing presentations, everyone was attentive and rarely had to be told to pay attention or be quiet – even the final presenters
had the class's full attention. Presenters were able to obtain help with no effort and they often joined Aragorn's prompting to help sing the songs he presented. Reflecting on Moll's (2005) "funds of knowledge", I noticed that the students brought to the school forum the necessities for transforming school and home domains into cohesive and transactive spaces for children to learn and grow together.

Dyson (1993) and Paley (1992) each observed how students include their friends in their stories and the importance of that act of love. Likewise, my students cast their peers and friends as a character in a play, the background musicians, as narrator, and as the audience. Fiona's retelling of Aimee's story about her dad's first job involved a puppet show starring Barbies as flight attendants. It appears the two Barbies were either discussing if Aimee's dad would be the new mechanic, or if they would get a job. Dyson and Genishi (1994) found that "within and through stories, we fashion our relationships with others, joining with them, separating from them, expressing in ways subtle and not so subtle our feelings about the people around us" (p.3). This relationship of friendship is important to all relationships and communities as it is an expression of love and caring (Freire, 2003; Noddings, 1992). I concluded that my students care for each other because they are friends and peers and have shared experiences with each other. They each care about each others' stories because they know each others' families. Do these new retellings provide for more understanding and care about each other because they know more about each other?
In their reflections after the story sharing presentations, students told me that “the fun parts with this project were when we told each other our stories, when we made up our acts, and when we performed our acts.” Aragorn thought the activities were fun because “we got to learn about other people’s cultures”. Erin and Fiona enjoyed “being able to do whatever you wanted to present your findings, it wasn’t just like a report.” Tali discovered that the activities were fun because “you could talk and have fun with your partner and listen to some funny and interesting stories” while Benny enjoyed “sharing our stories with other people”. Not one student thought this set of activities was boring or dull. Students were surprised not only about the content of the stories, but also about “the creative ways people performed the stories” (Benny). Olgee was surprised by the realization “that all our parents were kids once”. Students were also amazed how many of their peers, and parents, felt the same way about things, such as Confirmation. Madison realized “how hard growing up is for everybody” and that she really “enjoyed telling people what I think and what I believe”. Mandy’s reflection was probably the most profound: “What amazed me was that I don’t really know that much about my friends. I liked getting to know more about my friend’s parents.”

I also asked the students to reflect on what it was like to work with their partners as well as their parents. Students enjoyed telling each other their stories and learning about each other. Everyone commented on enjoying the work more, and finding it easier to complete, because they were able to talk, discuss, share opinion and laugh with each other. Armando liked working with partners
"because we can tell each other our ideas and give each other constructive criticism. This makes our product much better." Erin also enjoyed "working in pairs to tell stories because you could really talk, and relate. It was fun to look at things in a different perspective." Yannah found that "it's easier to talk to one person and listen." Corina "liked that we were supposed to show the class in clever ways what was in our stories." Students equally enjoyed working with their parents on storytelling.

Students discovered aspects of their parents' lives they had not known before and were happy they were "made" to talk to them. Students realized that their parents were once their age and had experiences just like them. John remarked how surprised he was that his parents could tell such "interesting stories". Erin and Aragorn found they could relate to their parents more after learning about their pasts. Mandy enjoyed learning new things about her mom because she learned more about what made their present life possible. Carmelo discovered that "working with my parents gets me closer to listening to them" while Olgoo found the storytelling activity "gave me more time to talk with my mom". Corina and Erin both "agreed that it is nice to spend some time with your parents and just talk. It is hard to talk to your parents at the age we are at currently." These activities provided the opportunity to talk and share family stories, and perhaps discuss other aspects of their lives.

It seems that many lessons were also internalized from the stories, particularly from the sharing of stories with a partner. From learning more about their relationship with God to work ethics, the students' reflections demonstrated
the power of storytelling. Corina “learned, through my partner’s story, that in whatever we do, God is always with you.” Erin discovered that her “partner’s mom is mainly where she is now because she went through many tough times in her childhood, and worked to get through it.” From her partner’s story, Mandy “learned that being patient and learning how to have a simple life can actually give you a better life”. From their partner’s stories, Frederick learned that you shouldn’t judge something before you try it and Armando learned that you have to work hard to achieve your dreams. Fiona realized “that if you really want to do something and you try hard to do it you can achieve all your goals”. The students who participated in these activities not only learned about their families and their classmates, but they also learned about themselves and how storytelling provided them with a creative outlet to express ideas and feelings. Community was created through the dialogue and caring connections made possible through these storytelling activities.

4.5 Closing Thoughts

The above discussion of my data evokes and corroborates the findings and ideas of the theorists, educators and researchers whose work is summarized in Chapter Two. As noted above, Dyson and Paley wrote of the importance of friendships and connections in the classroom. In my study, Madison, a shy student at the start of the study, gained confidence and self-esteem as the activities developed. Data from the story-dialogue session also mirrors King’s (1993) and Rosen’s (1988) observations that creating a communal space where
students feel safe to express their opinions and discover their stories is essential to community building and like Mello (2001), I too found that reflecting on each other’s stories as well as reflecting on the activities themselves lead to deeper responses and better understandings of themselves and their classmates. Like Zipes (1995), I learned that storytelling itself does not provide healing, or answers, but the dialogue that storytelling promotes can aid in further understandings and truth.

Last but not least, my data corroborates the comments of the storytelling advocates that stories engage students in meaningful ways. In any classroom, it is difficult to motivate every student to try their best and complete all their work, but I noted that for this activity students wanted to finish every step in order to move onto the next activity. Not one student complained that their partner did not do their work. And, instead of bored looks and feigned escapes to the washroom, the participating students laughed, talked, wrote and acted their way through their learning. As Aragorn stated at the end of the presentations, “So, when do we get to do this again? It was actually fun.”
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUDING THE STORY

And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.


5.1 Introduction

My experience as a teacher had led me to appreciate the importance of storytelling in the classroom. I realized how fascinating students' stories could be and how creative and imaginative students' work could be. I found myself wondering about my students' families and their stories and I speculated how sharing our stories could connect our classroom community. This final chapter presents my conclusions, questions and concerns regarding my classroom case study. I also suggest some implications both for my practice and for future research inquiries on the related topics of storytelling, literacy, dialogue, care and community.

5.2 Storytelling Connections

In Chapter Four, I discussed themes and unique elements in the students' stories and responses. The students' stories involved a variety of themes, including: coming-of-age and being responsible; work responsibilities; becoming
closer to God through Confirmation; and, marking celebrations of growing up. The stories and students’ responses to them also contained accounts of unique experiences: the death of friends, a mom attacked by intruders, a woman working to support her family and her brothers’ university education, working in a foreign country, and travelling independently.

From my data I inferred that storytelling is the “social art of language” (Paley, 1990, p.23) and came to see the activities as interpretative practices (Bruner, 1994). When one parent tells a life story to their child, and then that child retells it to another child, what new understandings about the parent and the child are forged? How is cultural knowledge interpreted and reinterpreted? I saw my students exploring the social world of our classroom through dialogue. I saw them selecting their own modes of response and exploring deeply their partner’s stories, an observation that was also shared by Gangi, 2004 and Goforth & Spillman, 1994. I sensed a growing feeling of connectedness among the students and witnessed their engagement and energy. I witnessed the pride they felt about their family stories and their partner’s stories. My students really did assume the role of “keeper of the family stories.”

There were, however, some lost opportunities. When students discovered commonalities among the stories their responses were positive. The discovery of common ground drew the students into a more cohesive group. On the other hand, some of the unique experiences described in the stories, powerful experiences that might have created opportunities for dialogue, were not taken up in the responses or the whole-class discussion. For example, the story in
which a mom used a machete and the story in which the rights of men over women to go to university were treated in matter-of-fact ways. I call these lost opportunities “silenced stories” and discuss them later in the chapter.

I wanted my storytelling activities to not only provide a space for sharing stories but also provide an opportunity to reflect on the themes of the Confirmation sacrament. While students enjoyed sharing and responding to each other’s stories, and some students had opportunities to ponder bigger questions, such as death and being more responsible, it was Madison’s research response that most encouraged everyone in the class to think about and reflect on their own fears of Confirmation and God. In similar future studies, it would be interesting to ask students to identify an issue they would want to research based on their family stories or on a fellow classmate’s story.

Finally, I believe it would have been valuable to ask the students' parents and guardians to reflect on the research activities with their children. Some parents did make comments to me about the activities and I realized that I could have built in opportunities to learn more about what transpired at home.

5.3 FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE

The New Literacy Studies approach (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005) informs my understanding of this case study. It was especially helpful for me to view the cross-curricular experiences in my classroom as literacy events and practices rather than lessons. Orchestrating the story-dialogue and the story sharing sessions as specific events in my classroom rather than as activities embedded
in a stream of classroom activity enabled me to focus on specific instances in the classroom, such as Manu and Kiki realizing the common connection of their dads to Saudi Arabia.

However, it is the notion that students bring to school “funds of knowledge” that caught my imagination. Moll (2005) and his colleagues argue that students’ can use their cultural resources and identities to develop further understandings of the world around them. I too believe that students’ home identities should be valued in the school domain. I now wonder to what extent my activities fostered the creation of a “third space” (Moje, et al, 2004) that could serve as a bridge between home and school-based literacy practices. I ask myself in what ways could parents and other family members have contributed more meaningfully to the study?

It was interesting, if not surprising, that sixteen of the stories were told by mothers and only seven were told by fathers. After all, this class of participating students consisted of twelve girls and eleven boys. I wondered if this meant that more of the students’ mothers were involved in their children’s schoolwork, or was it happenstance that more mothers were asked? The second instance is probable with this group of students as at least three of the fathers are frequently away on work-related travel, while, to the best of my knowledge, only one of the mothers travels for work. What I could have done to tap into the fathers’ “funds of knowledge”? I believed at the time that the topic was of interest to both genders, but perhaps I could have provided further topics to enlarge the scope and
increase the response. It is possible, too, that a consensus exists in the school community that homework, and perhaps stories, are women’s work.

It is noteworthy to mention that Frederick changed the protagonist’s gender in his picture book from female to male. What were his reasons? Both he and his partner, Blake, were told their original stories by their mothers. Why did Frederick present his fearful and unsteady Blob as a male? Does he view females as stronger? Does he want to avoid identifying with females? Or did Bob the Blob just sound better than Betty the Blob?

Overall, these stories allowed the students to bring their home identities into the classroom and share family experiences. The activities allowed students to reflect on their own stories as well as the stories of their classmates’ families and respond to how these stories improved their knowledge of each other and provided further connecting avenues to understanding each other. This study of intergenerational learning did enhance our classroom community by allowing a safe space (Rosen, 1988) for reflection, responses and dialogue.

5.4 DIALOGUE, CRITICAL LITERACY AND COMMUNITY

Possibilities for dialogue arose out of the storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing activities. For some students, the very act of storytelling and talking with their parents drew them into a dialogue about responsibilities and their relationship with God, as Lindsay and Erin both related. During the story-dialogue activity, all students, at one point, discussed aspects of their story and response to each other. Some of these discussions became reciprocal encounters (Buber,
as students shared, reflected and responded to each other’s stories and ideas. Felicity and Olgee were truly in dialogue with each other. Their stories spawned more stories, questions and responses, and they in turn connected with Yannah and Olgoo and Madison and Lindsay, each person listening and learning and responding. During the story sharing activity the story response that encouraged most dialogue was Madison’s “thesis” regarding fear, but, as noted earlier there were also some opportunities for dialogue that were overlooked.

What story topics were silenced? Whose “funds of knowledge” were privileged in my Catholic school classroom? Did some parents not want to participate because they thought their story was inappropriate? Did some parents and guardians choose a story they thought I expected? Would it have been helpful for both students and their parents and guardians if the family artefacts they were asked to bring into our classroom could have been more tangible objects, such as a sports award, a photograph or family heirloom, instead of an orally related story? Tangible objects could have provided the students with the basis for storytelling and interpretation too.

It is possible for stories to provide opportunities and spaces for dialogue about conflict, hardships and the differences between people and for storytellers to play a role in classroom community development (Zipes, 1995). I am aware now that some students’ stories embedded themes of death, violence, gender and other forms of social inequality and that we as a class did not take up these themes. We glossed over them. I am shocked now to read Blake’s poem depicting Frederick’s mom defending herself with a machete. It seems to make
light of something very serious. I am intrigued by the fact that “difficult” topics were sometimes missing in students’ responses to one another’s stories.

Is this what Zipes means when he warns people not to expect stories alone to do the literacy work? Should these topics be brought forward and discussed in class? If I wanted to involve students, how would I encourage them to ask critical questions? Pahl and Rowsell (2005) define critical literacy as “a way of looking at the embodied understandings within texts as opposed to a surface reading of texts” (p.153). Where is the power, social and historic relations in these stories. What truths are described? For example, why did the students not question the use of machetes? Referring to Huberman (1995), perhaps the original stories from the parents were a sort of emancipation of memories and lessons learned. Therefore, narratives assist people in telling their own stories, to share themselves on a personal level, by organizing their thoughts through the format of a story. What, then, do I personally make out of Mandy’s story? It was obvious to me that the fact her mother went to work after high school while her brothers went to university bothered Mandy, yet she did not discuss this with her partner. It would be interesting, in a future study, to include scheduled discussion topics to encourage critical dialogue regarding issues presented in the narratives and in the reflections.

Critical literacy is reputed to empower teachers and students to look beyond texts into their hidden meanings and to participate in a move towards social activism. Were my activities critical literacy events? What can I claim about my aim to promote social justice in the classroom through storytelling? In the first
place, I would reply that social justice entails social connections and social awareness and my students utilized their "funds of knowledge" to create connections and cultural understanding. However, it would be useful to further study the global issues presented in the stories, from working at a young age in Germany to working and looking after family in the Philippines. Issues of power inequities could be discussed too when talking about who gets an education to how far do you have to travel to obtain work? Looking critically at differences in our families is as important as looking at the similarities in order to promote understanding.

Storytelling does provide the opportunity to bring voices into the classroom and reflect and respond to them (Dyson, 1994). Whose voices were most evident? Whose voices were silenced? One thing was evident. Voices were not silenced by the audience's unwillingness to listen. During the story sharing presentations, as noted above, students were amazingly patient, encouraging and quiet. Even when one student, Aragorn, agreed to sing some of the songs for people's response presentations the creator of the response was also involved in the performance. For example, during Tali's story presentation, Aragorn sang the song and Tali provided the back-up vocals. I do wonder though if the 'stand-in' singer told the story the way the original creator wished, or did he add his own take on the song?

During both the story-dialogue and the story sharing activities, there appeared to be communal discourse occurring and, what Bakhtin (1981) termed a "symphony of voices". But, did all this communal discourse exclude unpleasant
stories? The topic of coming-of-age stories does lend itself to reveal positive stories of growing up or learning a lesson. Was the atmosphere in the classroom too light so that serious topics could not be raised? Certainly some serious topics were discussed and responded too by both partners and classmates. For example, Aimee’s story of her mom losing her high school friends in a drinking and driving accident was responded to by her partner Lindsay and discussed at length during her story sharing presentation. But, what about the topics that were not mentioned? Cazden (1994) found that teachers need to look for those stories that are told differently and not to reject them. By my silence, by not facilitating all the issues described in the stories, did I contribute to rejecting those story topics that were unpleasant?

Dyson and Genishi (1994) observed that “through stories, teachers learn of their children’s cultures, of their diverse experiences, and of their connections to family and friends” (p.2). Similarly, Wenger (1998) observed in communities of learners, that for “individuals, learning is an issue of engaging in and contributing to the practices of our communities. For communities, this entails refining practices and ensuring new generations of members” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2005, p.75). The stories, both original and retold, provided membership and these story markers (Dyson, 1997) also allowed students to voice opinions, such as when Madison asked everybody if they were scared at the prospect of being Confirmed and perhaps finding themselves closer to God in the process.
5.5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Writing this thesis has been a powerful learning process for me both as a teacher and as a researcher. This study is not only a piece of research, it has become part of my practice. I now have numerous new questions and ideas for future studies relating to storytelling, literacy, community and dialogue. Through this research I have uncovered missed opportunities to be addressed in a future action research study, such as the 'silenced stories'. This discourse focused on celebrating and connecting and I now wonder how I can tap those lost opportunities in my classroom and provide spaces to dialogue about issues of social justice with my students.

Dyson (1994) observed that social and cultural boundaries are crossed not only because of the children’s stories but in the gathering of students to enjoy each others’ stories. This was the case in my classroom too. I believed that stories would create a sense of community in the classroom but it was actually the dialogue and connections made during the story sharing and dialogue activities that fostered that sense of community. Stories aided the process, but it was the processes of telling, sharing and responding that mattered.

Through this experience with my students I learned more about them and their families and connected in ways I could not before. I hope my students and their parents and guardians continue to share and respond to each other in positive ways. This storytelling, story-dialogue and story sharing experience wove us together as a stronger community. We learned and shared together and drew bridges between our school and home lives. Jane Yolen (2000) claims that
“story is our wall against the dark” (p.120). It is that story that calls each of us as teachers and students to encounter each other by responding, reflecting and listening, to share and tell our stories, safely, in the classroom.

As with any generation
the oral tradition depends upon each person
listening and remembering a portion
and it is together –
all of us remembering what we have heard together –
that creates the whole story
the long story of the people.

Leslie Marmon Silko (1981) *Storyteller*
REFERENCE LIST


