

**Using narrative in the classroom:  
a pedagogy to promote student engagement**

**by**

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## Abstract

Sometimes a person needs a story more than they need food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. (Lopez, cited in Lewis, 2006, p. 831)

It is the purpose of this dissertation is to explore storytelling as a specific pedagogy that supports student engagement. In this dissertation *stories* or narratives (I use the words interchangeably) are carefully chosen remembrances, that are both age and content appropriate for the student audiences. *Narrative* (or *story*) as it is used in this discussion is defined as "...the act of telling, narrating or showing the subjective experience" (Schiff, 2006, p. 21). I will present the notion that the use of stories, told at an appropriate time in the classroom, may be recognized as a powerful pedagogy that goes beyond engaging students and becomes a means of generating a sense of wonder and awe in learners, particularly at the high school level.

To support the belief that using stories in the classroom may be one specific pedagogical approach that supports student engagement I have drawn upon ethnography to conduct my work, particularly through the media of storytelling and poetry, in order to give voice to my soul's deepest longing. Ethnographic research seems to complement this work, because "The complexity of human lives and social interaction cannot be reduced to a sterile laboratory experiment with strict control of variables characteristic of a scientific experiment. Instead, ethnography aims to study life outside of a controlled environment" (Murchison, 2010, p. 4).

The data for my research method are gathered from three sources: my own experiences as a teacher and a story teller, the words of expert teachers and theorists on the power of storytelling, and a series of interviews that I conducted with three professors from Simon Fraser University. The interviews focused on the professors' own use of storytelling pedagogy in the classroom.

**Keywords:** story telling; student engagement; high school students; ethnography

## **Dedication**

To Mary Kathleen Lannan: You are the best person I ever knew. I'll see you again sometime, hopefully dancing alongside the Ennis Road. This work is for you.

## Acknowledgements

In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, there is a scene that speaks volumes to me. It is the part when Eric Liddell, the Scottish runner, is talking with the future King of England and some other dignitaries. At one point during that scene, Liddell gazes into the distance and says, more to himself than to the others, *You know, I have spent four years just to be on this ship.* He is talking about the ship taking him and his teammates to the Paris Olympic Games.

In terms of my own doctoral journey, I have spent a *lifetime* pursuing this dream. I remember when my fairly cool sister, Kate asked me as a four year old, what I wanted to do when I was older. Without hesitation, I told her I wanted to be a professor. To me, the university, the ideal of a university, held a magic that has only gotten brighter and more colourful as I have gotten older. So it is that I have circuitously found myself graduating with a PhD forty something years later. In the thousands of miles since I first uttered those prophetic words, one of the best lessons that I have learned on this journey is that nothing happens in isolation. Like de Saint-Exupéry says, “Man is a knot into which relationships are tied.” I owe a debt of gratitude to the following that I fear shall never be repaid. They are as follows.

...My family: Mija, Brendan, and Sofia. You are the oxygen that has given me life these past seven years. Without you're undying loyalty, encouragement, and love

this would have remained a journey left unfinished.

...Gerry Lannan: Thanks for always playing sports with me and all of the kids in the neighbourhood, no matter how exhausted you were.

...Mr. Bevis Grimmer, a nobleman, a philosopher, and a hero to me. I miss you every day.

...To Kate, Greg, and Michael: Thanks for turning our well, despite a tough start.

...To the excellent teachers I have been privileged to work with, especially my dear friends at N.D. and S.J.B. You folks have been an inspiration.

...To my dear students over the years. You give me hope to believe that the future will be good.

...To Mauvereen Walker and Karen Matthews, two of the kindness and most knowledgeable people at SFU. You always made me feel like the endless and often ridiculous questions I asked were profound. I remain humbled by you.

...To the miracle worker, Ms. Barb Ralph. May I one day have the grace and elegance that you exemplify.

I will always remember what Thomas Merton, the writer and monk, said about a superb teacher he encountered at Columbia University. "Who is this excellent person before me?" Likewise, I ask that about virtually every teacher I have had at

Simon Fraser University. For the sake of brevity, I will refer only to those on my committee, with a few exceptions.

...Peter Grimmett. One of my favourite Peter Grimmett stories is when he once arrived about 30 seconds late for our 4:30 pm class. He apologized about being late and mentioned as an aside that he had just come from the airport, having attended a conference in the Middle East where he had been the keynote speaker. My classmates and I were too stunned to say anything. Never have I witnessed professionalism so clearly evidenced than through the teaching of that excellent person, Dr. Peter Grimmett.

...Dr. Carolyn Mamchur. For the past two or so years, most of my emails to Carolyn include the line, *How can I thank you?!* Carolyn you are one of the most loyal, brave, and brilliant people I have ever known. I will always remember being in one of your classes and seeing the love and loyalty that you inspired in your students. And why not? You bring that same love and loyalty to them! Like my own family, I shudder to think how my journey would have gone without you. You were the captain during the storms of my doctoral journey. You brought me peace, calm, and confidence. I love and adore you!

...Dr. Celeste Snowber: Thank you for your friendship and for your gorgeous writing that takes me to magical places under lavender skies.

...Dr. Linda Apps: You remind me of the French queen in the movie, *Braveheart*, to whom Mel Gibson's character says, *I see great strength in you*. Thank you for that great strength and for the gift of your friendship. I am honoured and strengthened by you.

...Dr. Susan Gerofsky: Thank you for the challenging questions that you posed. That is what academia is all about—challenging one to be better.

...Dr. Allan MacKinnon: I will always remember the conversation we shared in the moments before my oral defense began. It was like speaking to a sage, one who can put everything into perspective. You filled me with a serenity to celebrate my work with others.

...Dr. Yaroslav Senyshyn: You gave up a few hours of your time with me, to answer all of my questions, thoughtfully and professionally. At the end of it, you made me feel like it was entirely your pleasure. No my friend, the pleasure truly was mine!

...Dr. Paul Matthew St. Pierre: If I have any regrets about my time at SFU, it is that I didn't do about half of my coursework with Dr. Paul Matthew St. Pierre. He is a genius, and it is a pure gift to have spent some time with him. I remain in your debt.

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## **Chapter 1: Purpose, Need and Methodology**

### **Purpose:**

Sometimes a person needs a story more than they need food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves. (Lopez, 1990, p. 48)

*I remember years ago, sitting in a classroom with a group of bored students taking down from the board notes about miracles in a religion class. I began the class with a brief discussion of what constituted a miracle, and how one was to recognize one, and the evocative feelings a miracle produced. As I reflected on our brief talk about miracles and their accompanying wonder and awe, I looked at the students methodically and mechanically jotting down the facts and figures I had written on the board and I began to wonder what I was really teaching them about wonder and awe that day.*

*I stood up at my desk and instructed my class to follow me. They looked at one another awkwardly and recognized that they had better follow me, because I was already walking down the hallway towards the exit doors. Fortunately, the school faced a small park and, it was before the terrible Labrador winter hit (usually in October), where there always seemed to be preschoolers playing.*

*An interesting feature of this small park was the giant boulders that surrounded it. As we approached the park, I instructed my class of about 30 students*

*to huddle in groups of three and hide behind the boulders. Their mission: observe the little kids playing. Freed from the shackles of the classroom, my students efficiently organized themselves into groups and began to watch the little children play. One caveat I gave was that they must not disturb or even make their presence known to the little ones. For ten minutes my fascinated students watched in silence as the little kids played with reckless abandon. I could see by the expression of growing and intense interest on the faces of many of my students that they had long forgotten the meaning of true play.*

*When I corralled my group back into the classroom and got them in their seats, I began with a predictable, “Well, what did you notice?” Talk about engagement! My students commented on the fact that the kids had no idea anyone was watching them; others spoke about the songs the kids sang as they played; still others noted how many of the children skipped between the rides in the park rather than walking. This was genuine engagement. My students had been genuinely surprised when they had the opportunity to watch unobserved the small children’s spontaneous interaction. It really was an incredible awakening for both the students and for me! My students shared excitedly and enthusiastically what they had seen. It was a fun—no, joyful—moment that I treasure, seeing the students fired up, bursting to tell what they had seen. It was a teachable moment that bespoke the power of awe*

*and wonder and in turn student engagement.*

*The bell seemed to ring earlier than usual, but still the students lingered, several of them asking if they could repeat the activity the next day.*

I am convinced that if asked, albeit 15 years later, most students in that class would be able to recall the miraculous moment when we opened a window to the joy of learning. I have told that story to high school students for more than a decade now and students always seem to listen with rapt attention. In this I am reminded of Berger and Mohr (1995) who state, “When we find a photograph meaningful, we are lending it a past and future” (p. 89). The reality is that “memory and meaning making come together in the evocative, resonant space of the photograph” (Berger and Mohr, 1995, p.89). For me and, I am sure, many of my students, the narrative “photograph” that they carry in their memories of that simple activity still resonates meaningfully as they reflect on the past and present experience.

It is the purpose of this dissertation to explore storytelling as a specific pedagogy that supports student engagement. In this dissertation *stories* or narratives (I use the words interchangeably) are carefully chosen remembrances, that are both age and content appropriate for the student audiences. *Narrative* (or *story*) as it is used in this discussion is defined as “...the act of telling, narrating or showing the subjective experience” (Schiff, 2006, p. 21). I will present the notion that the use of

stories, told at an appropriate time in the classroom, may be recognized as a powerful pedagogy that goes beyond engaging students and becomes a means of generating a sense of wonder and awe in learners, particularly at the high school level. “There is a plethora of literature exploring the multiple benefits of stories for enhancing learning (Bergman, 1999; Boje, 1995; Davidhizar & Lonser, 2003; Haigh, 2005; Miley, 2005)” (cited in Miley, 2009, p. 358).

I will explore the notion that when one student hears a story that resonates, it connects to the fabric of his or her life, thus connecting with the past and the future. When I speak to my students about the joy of little children at play, I may be speaking to a student about a younger brother or sister who is the epitome of childish innocence and spontaneity. The story’s universal character may be a catalyst for lending that story its past and future. My own students, with whom I share this story, wonder what the students were like in the far reaches of Canada’s North; they perhaps may wonder whether they would have fit in with those students in the far North or conjecture what they themselves would have done and question whether they would have enjoyed that experience. Perhaps, they also would have thought, *Why can’t we do ever do that?* It is my belief that one of the reasons that students listen to stories is “that social life is a narrative” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 3).

## Need

My nearly twenty years of teaching in a variety of academic settings--rural, inner city, and overseas--has demonstrated to me that students disengage from the learning experience for a variety of reasons. Legault et al. (2006) talk about the continuing and curious yearly cycle of high school students that seem to disengage, characterized by many students as not having the interest and inclination to carry out the academic tasks required of them (p. 567). I believe that the way students feel about the instruction they receive, coupled with the effort that the instructor has made to connect with the individual students may affect student motivation. Stefanou et al., (2004) note the strong correlation between how students perceive the teacher's manner of instruction in the classroom and the motivational beliefs and behaviors that students hold (Stefanou et al., p. 97). At the individual level, the most specific reasons for student drop out were "'did not like school' (46%), 'failing school' (39%), 'could not get along with teachers' (29%), and 'got a job' (27%)" (Gentry, 2007, p. 4).

Having taught many, many students in Newfoundland, South Korea, and British Columbia, I have found that one of the greatest bonds linking these students from all over the globe seems to be a presumed boredom with school, as though it were an unpleasant obstacle, that one has to get over in order to get on with life and pursue what one really wants to do. My realization is not uncommon: "Spending just

a few hours in the classroom situation as a participant observer, one definitely recognizes ‘boredom’ as one of the main features of this situation” (Breidenstein, 2007, p. 93). According to a study by Finnan & Chasin (2007), “Nearly half of the sample [of American high school students] cited boredom as their reason for dropping out” (p. 626). One is reminded of the line from one of Beckett’s characters in *Waiting for Godot*. “All I know is that the hours are long, under these conditions, and constrain us to beguile them with proceedings which-how shall I say—which may at first seem reasonable, until they become a habit” (Beckett, 2006, p. 157).

The claim that school is far too often a boring environment for students is an assertion with which Egan (1997) concurs.

Education is one of the greatest consumers of public money in the Western world, and it employs a larger workforce than almost any other social agency. The goals of the education system—to enhance the competitiveness of nations and the self-fulfillment of citizens—are supposed to justify the immense investment of money and energy. School—that business of sitting at a desk among thirty or so others, being talked at, mostly boringly, and doing exercises, tests, and worksheets, mostly boring, for years and years and years is the instrument designed to deliver these expensive benefits. (p. 9)

With these precipitators in mind, it seems prudent to address strategies for ameliorating this phenomenon.

Using narrative may be regarded as a specific and effective pedagogy to promote student engagement which will lead to student learning and school

completion. I employ storytelling pedagogy, stories from my own life experience, in my teaching practice because nothing can be more important to the teacher than to examine the critical links between one's deeply felt personal life experience and the meaning of the content one wishes to convey to students. It is in this spirit that I heed the words of Jean Vanier. "We have disregarded the heart, seeing it only as a symbol of weakness...instead of as a powerhouse of love that can reorient us from our self-centeredness, revealing to us and to others the basic beauty of humanity" (Vanier, 1998, p. 78).

Storytelling pedagogy can promote student learning through relationship of narrative to teacher and content. "Each story increases the awareness of others regarding human experience and the desire to establish a connection with the social fabric" (Aguirre, 2005, p. 148). When a teacher shares a story about a time when she was in a music concert or a sporting contest, narrating whether it was exciting or stressful and why, I contend that it may become easier to create a connection with one's students because of the shared humanity of teacher and student.

Egan (1997) suggests that "what makes others' lives interesting to us is the degree to which we can imaginatively grasp them in terms of the emotions, hopes, fears, and intentions we can share" (pp. 259-260). When used effectively, stories unite us in our common humanity. It is because of this that I propose to use story as

pedagogy to promote student engagement which will lead to student learning.

Egan (1989) makes an important observation when he suggests that “The dominant model [of education] and its associated research programs have tended to suppress the affective aspects of learning. Consequently they have drawn on only a divided part of children’s capacities” (p. 29). Educators may seek to embrace the affective side of children by sharing stories from their own lived experience. Byrnes (1997) contends that “the structure, dominant pedagogy, and disciplinary divisions of American secondary schools have remained relatively unchanged for nearly 100 years” (p. 150); but working within this framework, an educator may seek to impassion the learners by creating opportunities for students to learn with their hearts and not just their minds, and storytelling may be one way to do that.

Teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has become increasingly complex. One reason for this may be attributed to the number of students in the classroom that come from different cultures, which can often make it difficult for students to learn and which may cause prejudice.

There is a persistent incongruence between most teachers’ racial identities and students racial identities in U.S. schools. Students of color are projected to account for half of the U.S. population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004) ...As a result of this racial imbalance between teachers and their students, there is an inherent responsibility for teacher educators to stretch their students’ learning experiences to include meaningful multicultural experiences. (Garcia Fierros, 2009,

pp. 3, 4)

One way to respond to the growing imbalance between the cultural identities of teachers and students may be through the human universality of storytelling pedagogy.

Storytelling pedagogy addresses myriad universal themes, such as courage, honour, loyalty, love, and death. Stories that involve these universal themes speak to the humanity of the audience, regardless of the cultural makeup. And in my near twenty years of teaching practice, I, too, have found that the composition of my classes has increased greatly.

In many cultures, particularly indigenous ones, stories play a major role in the culture: “Stories are the means by which many Navajos have constructed the meaning of life, of human beings, and of the universe; they are the means by which this knowledge is passed on” (Eder, 2007, p. 279).

Narratives are universal. They are something that every student has heard. They are something that every student has told, whether on the phone, through social media, or in person. Stories are a bridge to our common humanity. Abma (2003) talks about the potential that storytelling has as both a way of making sense of oneself and for helping to provide clarity during challenging circumstances (Abma, p. 223). Storytelling helps make human beings who and what they are: “Humans are

storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus the study of the narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Storytelling pedagogy may be one way to stimulate learning when stories connect with students’ interests, experiences, hopes, dreams, and to some aspect of their world.

Engagement in learning-intellectual engagement develops when students encounter work that is relevant, interesting, and connects with their aspirations and interests; when the work they do is authentic, challenging, deeply conceptual, highly social, and collaborative; when the ideas of each student are valued; and when the relationship between the teacher and the student, and among students themselves, is both reciprocal and generous in spirit. (Dunleavy and Milton, 2008, p. 5)

The majority of students are sensing types and learn from examples. According to Mamchur (1996) 80% of the average North American high school population is a sensing type (p. 8). “Sensing types [of students] ...want to see, hear, and touch as they learn. Often they can learn by observing and mimicking behaviours” (Mamchur, 1996, p. 27). I believe that storytelling supports this type of learning by combining aspects of pedagogy that include visual as well as auditory experiences for the students. When I share a story, my gestures become animated, and I have witnessed students telling a story I have shared in the past using many of the same gestures that I incorporated into the telling.

In an article called, “All Life is Movement. All Movement is Dance. All Life

is Sacred. All Life is Sacred Dance,” Minke de Vos captures what I mean regarding a more embodied way of learning and teaching. ‘When the wind of the Divine blows through the instrument of my body, I feel connected to the creative energy of the universe, earth and humanity. This sacred connection is a communion, a communication of our unity, grace and soulful expression’ (retrieved from <http://www.interspiritualsacreddance.org> Tuesday, October 11, 2011).

Storytelling in the classroom may promote student engagement, because narratives provide real life examples for teenagers in high school. The stories that I have shared with my classes and with the reader represent almost five decades of lived experience. I value and reflect upon that experience. I attempt to convey the importance of reflecting upon the time I have lived with my students through narration. We occupy a society that bombards our young people with conflicting messages, from the way teenagers *should* dress, what fast food they *should* eat, to how much weight teenage girls *should* lose in order to be lovable and attractive. I suggest that teenagers would do well to know that they are important, connected, and understood in and of themselves. Storytelling “is a means for understanding ourselves and our place in the world” (retrieved from <http://www.teachingvalues.com> Thursday, December 15, 2011).

## Methodology

After spending four years in educational psychology, designing experiments and drawing upon empirical measurement to understand the hopes, dreams, and frustrations of learners, I began to feel like an artist using a large brush to try to depict the subtle nuances, colours, and textures that were easily missed and harder still to measure. I came to agree that “Statistics remove the individual like a summer rain washes away chalk” (Pelias, 2004, p. 35). I want to fill in the individuating details with storytelling pedagogy so that disengaged students learn to understand who they are and their relationship with the world around them. “The increased focus on the person in evaluation (Kushner, 2000) opened the way for narrative, story, photographs, and dialogue to be added to the repertoire of qualitative evaluation methods (see, e.g., Abma, 1999; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Eisner, 1991; Winter, Buck, & Sobiechowsha, 2001)” (cited in Simons & McCormack, 2007, pp. 293-294).

To support the belief that using stories in the classroom may be one specific pedagogical approach that supports student engagement I have drawn upon ethnography to conduct my work, particularly through the media of storytelling and poetry, in order to give voice to my soul’s deepest longing.

Ethnographic research seems to complement this work, because “the complexity of human lives and social interaction cannot be reduced to a sterile

laboratory experiment with strict control of variables characteristic of a scientific experiment. Instead, ethnography aims to study life outside of a controlled environment” (Murchison, 2010, p. 4).

The data for my research method are gathered from three sources: my own experiences as a teacher and a story teller, the words of expert teachers and theorists on the power of story telling, and a series of interviews that I conducted with three professors from Simon Fraser University. The interviews focused on the professors’ own use of storytelling pedagogy in the classroom.

Telling interesting and engaging stories may be one way for an educator to fire the spark of curiosity that is present in each high school student in order to promote student engagement. “I have never known a child, no matter how superficially unmotivated she or he might seem, whose indifference, hopelessness, or rage did not mask a lively imagination and dreams of challenging work, lasting love, and a fullness of being” (Kohl, 1994, p. 72).

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

“When you are old, hoard your stories like a miser would gold. If you lose them, you’ll have nothing left” (Pelias, 1999, p.35).

In this chapter, I seek to link student engagement to the current research on storytelling in the classroom as a specific and effective pedagogy. I have focused in this chapter upon four sections, each of which I believe is significant when exploring the positive relationship between story telling and student engagement: The power of narrative; Connecting with the student; Engaging the student; The complex nature of teaching.

I have resisted the temptation to narrowly categorize my references by such artificial labels as psychologist, educator, philosopher, and theorist. My intention here is to underscore the universal nature of story telling.

One underlying assertion to this dissertation is that narrative has power. It helps provide a context for students with the lesson that I am teaching. “Context is crucial to meaning making” (Barkhuizen, 2008, p. 232). Keeshig-Tobias (1990) talks about the importance of stories, which I believe has a transferable value to the field of learning. “Stories, you see, are not just entertainment. Stories are power. They reflect the deepest, most intimate perceptions, relationships, and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a people, a culture, thinks” (Keeshig-Tobias, 1990, p. 92). The use of storytelling in the classroom may be one means by which to connect with one’s

students. Snowber also reminds us that “Teaching is the art of word becoming flesh” (Snowber, 2010a, p. 149); and Lewis (2006) claims that “Telling stories enables me, and others, to know who we are” (p. 832). Stories may be a means to connect with the other by helping us to recognize and understand better another person’s perceptions, and attitudes, as well as to help us recognize our own.

Over the past decade and a half of my teaching career, students have consistently expressed surprise (and a measure of gratitude) that storytelling is a natural and inclusive pedagogy in my classroom, regardless of the subject being taught. Perhaps this should not be surprising because, as Pedersen (1995) observes, storytelling was used as the original form of teaching pedagogy (Pedersen, p. 2). However when questioned, my students consistently refute the idea that they have had other teachers who regularly share stories in the classroom, this despite the fact that “Over the past three decades, scholarly inquiry into narrative has yielded an enormously rich, sophisticated, and catalytic body of literature (cf. Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992; Sarbin, 1986)” (cited in Gergen & Gergen, 2006, p.112).

Storytelling pedagogy is one way to convey wisdom and insight to one’s students to ensure their continuity or preservation. “Throughout history, storytelling has been a fundamental part of human lives...stories helped in passing knowledge of

ancestors to future generations” (Heo, 2009, p. 406).

For many cultures around the world, the power and importance of storytelling cannot be understated. ‘I will tell you something about stories...They aren’t just entertainment/Don’t be fooled/They are all we have, you see/All we have to fight off /Illness and death. You don’t have anything /If you don’t have the stories’ (Silko cited in King, 2003, p. 92). One may be teaching the class about *Macbeth* and sterilize it to the point that students fail to see the significance and relevance of the major themes of the play—loyalty, honour, betrayal, and deceit, if the teacher has failed to connect the play to the world around them. Everything may be made a teachable opportunity through narrative. Many of the Christian saints are renowned for having a *Christ consciousness*. This motif could be adapted for educators by suggesting that teachers consider a storytelling consciousness. Their experiences in the world may possess something, if only the seeds, of an opportunity to teach something to the class, through an engaging and relevant story. Skeiker (2010) observes that “Storytelling in Syria is...a continued living tradition” (p. 223). I suggest that stories from a teacher’s life may be employed to create a living tradition in the classroom.

Kohl (1994) informs us that effectively told stories have the power to create a magic that I believe is too often missing in the average high school classroom. “Telling children’s stories, for example, allows the children to enter worlds where the

constraints of ordinary life are transcended... children step into good stories, just as I stepped into the world of the Masked Rider, and listened as if in trance” (Kohl, 1994, p. 39).

We know from the literature that stories, like poems, have a transformative ability. Balakrishnan, (2008) contends that the central power that stories have to affect another person is through the story’s ability to engage the listeners on an emotional level (Balakrishnan, p. 11). This notion is particularly well illustrated through poetry. The following is my attempt to catch a glimpse of what is meant by *engaging listeners with the emotions they illicit.*

### *Jumping Backwards*

*His name was Dick Fosbury.  
To some,  
even his name was funny.*

*He was a high jumper.  
He was also a dreamer.  
I think of the little girl sitting in the front row.  
Pretty ribbons above her sad face.  
The naughty boy in the back,  
eyes looking out the window at the distant fields.*

*As they warm up  
taking their jumps:  
Forward, Linear, Orderly  
Dick Fosbury jumps  
Backwards!  
And they laugh.*

*The little girl, best at math and reading,  
wanders through the playground  
Mostly alone.*

*The boy is in his fields,  
laughing and running  
His dancing eyes alive now.*

*The jumpers laugh and mock  
Dick Fosbury.  
He breathes in their laughter  
like rocket fuel*

*The bell and relief for the girl  
For the boy, back to class and his window.  
Fosbury passes on the first two rounds.  
The bar is now set to more than seven feet high  
No one can jump this/ No one ever has.*

*A few of the other jumpers stretch,  
A few idly watch Dick Fosbury's attempt  
He runs.  
He jumps.  
He sails over the bar by more than three inches.*

*Backwards!*

*The packed stadium is silent  
like some classrooms are silent.  
The children are in neat rows,  
Just like the seats in this stadium.*

*For the boy in the back row,  
It takes something like...  
doing it backwards  
To make him notice.*

*The front row unhappy girl is quietest of all.  
She has to be.*

*She is the top student who works hardest  
And it shows:  
She is the most serious.*

*Dick Fosbury spent a lot of time alone,  
dreaming, reading, training.  
He believed in doing things differently.*

*A special guest is in the classroom today.  
A teacher that seems to smile a lot.  
He says he has a story to tell us.  
No, I'm sorry  
You can't sit in your chairs right now;  
I need us to sit in a nice corner,  
Just you and I, my friends.*

*I see the sad little girl  
Now confused and little suspicious.  
Mrs. Orderly never does this with us.  
Will I get top marks at this, she wonders.  
I see the little girl's concern on her face  
her loneliness, her fear, her stress.  
Yes, little kids have stress like big people.*

*I want to hold her, tell her it's ok  
They say I mustn't do that.  
That would be wrong.  
Who are you anyway?*

*Dick Fosbury gets up and looks around  
The stadium beginning to erupt.  
The other jumpers are now staring at him.  
Who are you anyway?*

*The little girl in the front row is laughing.  
The happy man's story is funny.  
It's about a horse and a road in a cute little town called Killarney  
and how the horse stopped in the road one day and refused to go forward.*

*Dick Fosbury refused to go forward  
that beautiful day in Mexico,  
even when everyone else said he should.  
He just knew there were other ways.*

*The happy man smiles.  
The boy sits beside the girl with pretty ribbons in her hair.  
They are happy together,  
with their backs to the window and their eyes sparkling and dancing.*

*When they told Dick Fosbury  
he had just set the World and Olympic record  
his eyes sparkled and danced,  
just like they did when he was a little boy in school.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

I believe that a poem like the one above is wrought with the potential to affect another person through its ability to engage the listeners on an emotional level, as Balakrishnan (2008) suggests, because it is an actual story of a likeable underdog who gave his best in the face of great opposition and still triumphed. The students become emotionally invested because I believe that it is easy to appreciate someone, particularly when he has shown courage in doing his absolute best.

One may also consider the potential that storytelling pedagogy may have for helping students to change their personal narrative about school. "...we make sense of our experiences through the stories we create about them, stories created within particular cultural and historical contexts, stories created to make sense of the past and provide a template for the future" (Jago, 2006, p. 401). I believe, however, that it is

important to use storytelling pedagogy under specific conditions.

I suggest that the stories one shares with the class be age and content appropriate, but also that they be of a subject matter that is comfortable with the teller as well. “It’s not that you have to dig down to your deepest most horrible secrets and express them at every moment, it’s just a matter of looking at who you are and what’s going on and speaking from there” (Cutts, 1997, pp. 108-109). I believe that it is helpful to ask if one’s teaching is supporting and honouring the playful spirit of youth or are we perpetuating a notion that learning must be boring and tedious? One may even call this a pedagogy of hospitality.

This is a poem I share with the classes when I want to honour the playful spirit of youth. It is about a person from my neighbourhood that personifies for me youth and all its folly.

*Peter Hallen*

*Peter Hallen’s parents spoke in such a strange way  
that I always thought they were making it up.  
They always seemed loud and upset  
in their made up language.*

*Where I grew up nobody had been born in this country;  
yet everyone got along.*

*I never heard Peter speak his parent’s language.  
Peter didn’t speak often; he mostly just barked or sang.*

*He was very big and enjoyed to hit people  
as he sang in a high falsetto voice.*

*Peter would chase me down the halls of my elementary  
school, serenading me as I fled.  
Even though our education at the time was minimal,  
we all knew that Peter was crazy.*

*Easily the strongest and most unstable,  
Peter was an excellent football player.  
He was great at defense,  
because he got to knock people over.*

*At one game, I remember falling into a pile  
With Peter on top of the quarterback.  
I can still see the strange look on the face of the player  
as Peter sang to him.*

*Years and years passed  
And I found myself studying in the Nation's capital.  
One Saturday I needed to make a trip to Toronto.  
As I sat on the Greyhound bus I heard a strangely familiar barking noise, followed by  
the sound of opera.*

*To my horror, and, I suppose, a bit of pleasure,  
I saw Peter Hallen driving the bus I was on.  
He looked at me and began to bark into the microphone.  
I cowered in my chair because I was now grown up.*

*Peter continued and motioned for me to sit up by him.  
Fearful yet curious to learn about his life  
I sat up close.*

*He was still big and apparently still insane.  
I smiled at him and asked him how he was.  
He laughed and told me that he loved driving old people.  
He asked me about a few old friends that he'd enjoyed chasing.  
And we got caught up.*

*He'd been driving for 15 years.  
He told me that he mostly drove seniors  
across the country.*

*Old folks' tours, and then he barked, seemingly uncontrollably.  
They love me, he said, especially when I sing.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

I believe that narrative has a power to help both the teacher and the student to perceive things with greater openness. Through narrative students and teacher "...can travel to other worlds lovingly, [on] a journey in which we learn to love others, rather than view and perceive others arrogantly" (Caine & Steeves, 2009, p. 6). Lugones, (1987) clarifies how storytelling pedagogy may help to enhance a student's attitude to others. "The reason why I think that traveling to someone's 'world' is a way of identifying with them is because by traveling to their 'world' we can understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes" (Lugones, 1987, p. 17).

Narrative is a fundamental aspect of life. The idea of storytelling pedagogy as one specific means to promote student engagement is validated by the literature that supports storytelling as a way of making sense of our lives. For example, Aguirre, 2005; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Czarniawska, 2004; Eder, 2007; Egan, 1997; King, 2003; Lewis, 2006; Widdershoven & Sohl, 1999.

Story telling best achieves this end when it consists of narratives with which

the students can readily identify. For example, if the teacher played sports, a musical instrument, or is willing to share aspects of a trip that he or she went on – experiences that the students themselves may well have engaged in and then connect it to the lesson in a creative manner, students may well be more fully engaged in the lesson.

The purpose of such a particular, context-sensitive approach is for teachers to make sense of their own working situations and thus to practice in a contextually-appropriate way. The reasoning behind such an aim is that teachers teach best and learners learn best in situations that are compatible with their backgrounds, beliefs, and expectations. (Barkhuizen 2008, p. 233)

Stories and poems like this one help to explore the power of storytelling, which for this dissertation, are designed to bring clarity to the more abstract, philosophical ideas being expressed. I like to share the following poem with my students because I believe that it provides a universal experience that most students can identify with, particularly during the warm months of the school year when summer vacation is approaching.

*The House with the Pool*

*There was one house in my neighbourhood  
that had a swimming pool.  
Happily and unhappily  
it belonged to a good friend of everyone.*

*He knew us well enough to let us swim sometimes  
But also well enough to tell us to go away.*

*He refused to be used, he said.  
We only want to use your pool we cried.*

*A short friend I had used to like to jump off  
the cabana onto us as we swam, thinking it funny;  
or he would scratch us and then swim away.*

*On scorching hot days  
we would silently gather in front of the house with the pool,  
keeping silent vigil till someone looked out the front window.  
Bathing suits on; we were prepared.*

*The demands on the pool were great.  
My friend was popular, especially in hot weather.  
But he also had a pretty sister;  
she, too, had many friends, both boys and girls.*

*My friend's dad spoke a strange language,  
and when angered, he spoke it very quickly  
and loud.  
Then we understood it was time to leave.*

*We wanted to use his pool in the winter  
As the first hockey rink in the neighbourhood.  
We thought he would be flattered,  
but he just got angry like his dad.*

*He always did his homework,  
this fellow with the pool.  
We wondered if there was a connection  
between working hard and having a pool.*

*My own dad said you'll find out when you're older.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

Teachers may use the power of narrative in a manner that will do most good,

and in this case, that will promote both the teacher's own professional success and the success of the learners by relating stories that are clear, and connected to the lives of both the narrator and the students.

Instead of lecturing, the teacher may share with the class a story that may engage the students and help them to make connections to the lesson. Miley (2009) contends that students are more likely to take ownership of the information presented in the classroom if they can connect it to that which is already recognizable (Miley, p. 358). I suggest that connecting school lessons to life through oral narrative creates a sense of vibrancy and helps engage the audience. Harris (2007) supports the idea that stories may be most effective when they are told from a place of sincerity and are adapted to address individual situations (Harris, p. 113). Nobel Prize winning author John Steinbeck wrote, "I have come to believe that a great teacher is a great artist and there are as few there as there are any other great artists. It might even be the greatest of the arts since the medium is the human mind and spirit" (Steinbeck, 2003, p. 142). Using the power of narrative to promote student engagement may be one way to enhance a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom.

In the light of the many unproductive and negative factors in today's students' world, using storytelling pedagogy may be a way to help lead them in a positive direction. Sharing stories of people that have done admirable things or have had bad

things happen to them may influence in a positive way those students that are exploring some potentially dangerous activities. Story telling need not be preaching but rather, engaging. Stories as may be significant in the role they play in helping to make sense of one's experiences. "Stories can transport our experiences into the situations they relate and involve us in producing the meanings of those events as though we were participants" (Wegner, 1998, 203). The power of narrative as a specific way of promoting student engagement through meaning making finds further support in the literature. Thus, Crump (2009) makes an interesting observation about how we fashion our understanding through shared stories. "Meaning does not lie in our experiences" (p. 2); but rather, as Crump (2009) suggests, story telling is one way of telling another person who we are and how we would like to be perceived (Crump, p. 2).

Narrative may also provide an opportunity for the teacher to be a positive role model and leader. The word "educate" comes from the Latin "ēducāre" meaning to rear, which comes from the word "ducere", meaning to lead (retrieved from <http://www.etymonline.com> Saturday, August 6, 2011). If teachers are going to rear, in the way that a loving parent seeks to rear her or his child and lead that child, then it may be done wisely, employing any appropriate method at one's disposal. Appropriate storytelling pedagogy may be implemented as one effective way of

promoting student engagement, helping them to make healthy choices.

Using the power of narrative may create a living tradition in one's classroom.

I believe that it is up to the teacher to infuse the lesson with life, love, passion, and a sense of wonder and discovery. In his *Imagination in Teaching and Learning*, Egan (1992) stresses the need to humanize the lesson taught in the classroom.

So instead of teaching polynomials in mathematics as just a set of manipulations and algorithms to be learned, one will pause and search either for the human emotions involved in the initial invention of this branch of mathematics—who? why? What kind of people? What was the story involved?—or for how their use affects people's lives in the present— what human use is this branch of mathematics put to? (p. 106)

I share this story, an actual event from my childhood, in order to imbue a lesson with life, love, passion, and a sense of mystery. I believe that it helps to capture a student's interest by showing the humanity of his teacher.

### *Meeting the Queen*

*My most vivid memory of my earliest schooling is having a teacher that, in any circle, would be regarded as stern. The name, Mrs. Russell, still sends shivers down my back. Even though the span of time that has passed since the second grade has allowed for a multitude of experiences, I still remember vividly how this teacher looked and acted. However, I cannot recall the sound of Mrs. Russell's normal*

*speaking voice, as shouting was her routine mode of communication. Yelling was perhaps what she did most effectively. That said, she did not have much opportunity to bellow at me. I was a perceptive child, brought up in a gentle environment, and so I became quite a good actor and missed at least half of that school year, claiming stomach aches and countless other ailments to keep me at home, where I was safe from her tirades.*

*One day that I did attend school that year was a very special day: Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II was going to drive down a major road not far from our school. I remember it very well. Mrs. Russell helped us to recognize the importance of the occasion by yelling,*

*“You will be as sorry for the rest of your lives if you act up in any way!”*

*Despite this, as we waited by a four lane road—that today is a highway—an inspiring thought came to me. I quietly gathered a group of my friends and persuaded them to kick rocks onto the street so that Queen Elizabeth would get a flat tire and we would be able to help her. I thought it both brilliant and daring, as Mrs. Russell would have doubtless committed a public homicide if she had found out. My friends and I began in earnest, kicking only the most dangerous looking rocks that would flatten our monarch’s tires. With the task accomplished, though I was breathing hard, I was feeling the quiet satisfaction of a job well done.*

*At some point, between thinking that my good work would bear great fruit and the shocked look that was bound to appear on the face of the Queen's driver, Mrs. Russell noticed the rather large quarry of rocks on the street in front of us. To the everlasting credit of my friends, nobody "ratted" me out; it was that kind of neighbourhood: No one ever made fun of somebody's mother and people stuck together against an outsider (or a teacher that enjoyed yelling at her students).*

*Mrs. Russell knew foul play was at work and ordered all of us—the entire class—back to the school at once. It was beyond our comprehension. This was the most important person to visit our area in years, the Queen of England, and we were being told to leave.*

*Mrs. Russell marched us back in a state of disbelief while the entire rest of the school stared at the road in high anticipation of Her Majesty's arrival. When we got back to the classroom we sat glumly at our desks and did mathematics drills. At recess the usual games of chase and our robust enthusiasm were absent. We stood in small, dejected groups talking about what it would have been like to see the Queen and what we might have said to her if we'd only had the chance.*

*One of my chums wanted to know if she drank tea every day; another wanted to see if the Queen really looked like her picture on the money. And one of the nice girls in the class had secretly wanted to know if her carriage had once really been a*

*pumpkin. I didn't know the answer to any of these questions. All I knew at the time was that I really missed having the chance to see the Queen in person. I think all of us did, because we talked about it for months after and regretted having tried to flatten the tires on her car just for the chance to meet her.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

The power of narrative is clarified by Egan (1989). "Children's imaginations are the most powerful and energetic learning tools" (p. 2). Not to attempt to stimulate the child's imagination seems to me a missed opportunity. To share real stories from a teacher's lived experience may nurture the students' imagination and promote student engagement. I agree with Kokkotas et al (2010) who state "We believe that storytelling helps the development of a romantic understanding because stories make students experience curiosity, mystery, and even wonder" (p. 383). A teacher's narrative may create a more stimulating environment for the learner; which I believe is important, for as Noddings (2005) posits, we need to make the classroom a happy place for the learners.

To harness the power of narrative in the classroom, it is important to recognize the value of bringing one's whole being to the performance. I use the word *performance* because it seems to elevate it above the word *teaching* or even *sharing*. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that the etymology of the word *performance* comes

to the English language “via Anglo-Fr. [from the word] performer... [which means] to do, carry out, finish, accomplish” (retrieved from <http://www.etymoline.com> Sunday, November 8, 2009). Based on the etymology, performance’s original meaning presupposed not merely an attempt to engage in an act but to succeed in that act. As I see it, to succeed at most things of consequence, one must bring his entire being into play. Pickering claims that “genius is diligence” (retrieved from <http://www.critiquemagazine.com/article/pickering.html> Monday, November 9, 2009).

I would amend that slightly to say that it is also an investment of oneself. The performance of a story for one’s class involves drawing upon one’s bodily reserves, a kinesthetic union of self expression and a desire to forge in the students’ memory of this beautiful and, hopefully, profound encounter.

Pelias (1999) encapsulates my advocating narrative as performance that goes beyond the realm of entertainment to something almost sublime. “Performance is a desire for the ineffable, to say what cannot be said by placing one’s soul on the tongue, by sacrificing through discipline and prayer, by trusting the sheer luck or magic that beckons one to dance in the playground of angels” (p.109). The storyteller, like a dancer, harnesses her body and soul for the presentation of her craft. The power of narrative is a sharing of oneself that benefits from a generosity of spirit that becomes an invitation to one’s audience to share in the truth of shared experience. In

the way that “Poetry is plucking at the heartstrings, and making music with them” (retrieved from <http://www.educationoasis.com>, Monday, November 9, 2009), I recognize narrative as uniting our hearts to listen to the song of life. Storytelling to promote student engagement may provide an opportunity to draw upon one’s whole being.

With storytelling, the interaction is creative, as both teller and listener create the story. Words are used to create mental pictures of the story. The storyteller’s face, voice, body, and personality help to convey meaning and mood. (Mallan, 1991, p. 5)

I have sought to capture my own sense of need for investing my whole being when sharing a story. I regard storytelling as a bodily necessity, where my facial gestures, voice, tone, and body language work in concert to support the narrative I am presenting.

### *Inner World Workings*

*When I share a story with my classroom, I am not simply telling the students something. I could tell them a weather forecast. I want to share this news, this drama to the full extent of my being in the way that a millionaire will pass on his treasured items to a valued niece.*

*So I ask myself how can I do this act, perform this ritual?*

*I must summon my being, my body, to the performance, like a dancer on opening night. I must share myself, not give myself away; I must loose myself from the shackles of time and space for a while. Perhaps my voice undulates and modulates to wrap my listeners in a down-filled blanket on a snowy morning in a log cabin; perhaps my voice becomes a booming cannon shot, echoing off the rocks, high above the ocean;*

*perhaps my voice flutters like the humming birds outside the window. And so I try to create the environment which will help the students fully participate in the experience I am reliving.*

*My body becomes the characters, the hopes, fears, and folly that the story demands of it. I lean, I crouch, I stand tall and then cower before them as they sit gathered like a villagers united around a fire. My face is a lightning rod. Eyes burning, smoldering, dancing, closed, like Eric Clapton making love to the notes on his guitar. I cannot stand still! Sitting is an impossibility, an egregious disconnect between the narrative and the narration. I must move. I have to respond like a surfer to the ebb and flow of the great waves that dictate my momentum. It is where the story takes me. I an obedient servant to the story's trajectory, and I cannot be contained. A lion is wild. A story is on the loose.*

*I am that lion the moment the story is unfurled. I have to let it out. It demands hearing because it is so human and pure. It is my gift to my students. It is mine to bestow in the spirit of compassion. It is an antidote for a troubled world. It's the magic flower discovered in the sunny part of a dark forest that is not found on any of the maps. It's that rare butterfly that you only saw in your dreams as a child under the August moonlight.*

*I am Hercules unchained; my taut muscles undulate beneath my garments as I tell my story. I am transformed; they are transfixed. It is a part of me and yet my story is separate from me, like two voyagers at night on the sea, visible only by the cabin lights in the fog. But I feel the story in me, and like a dormant volcano that has had enough, I explode in a celebration of imaginative possibilities, that even I am puzzled by and yet grateful for.*

*This is my voice. Are these my words? Yes! Of course, they are. Yet where do they come from? A life of experience, a life of recording, storing, gathering, treasuring, cradling the stories, and keeping them close to me, under the blanket of my memory.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

I believe that the essence of my poem is captured in a poem called *Bodypsalms for Re-Knitting a Life* by Snowber (2010b) that seeks to express an embodied way of knowing.

In this (w)holy place  
there is an aesthetic of randomness  
borne through the living place of creation  
each child in the universe  
is woven into the fabric of the larger story  
the story whose name is  
rewritten to  
the place where we are known  
and know.

Like de Saint-Exupéry, I believe that “Man is a knot into which relationships are tied” (retrieved from <http://www.quotegarden.com> on Tuesday, August 16, 2011).

As an educator, I contend that the relationship with one’s students is significant.

Because a teacher meets with students five days out of seven, I believe that this is a good opportunity for the teacher to connect with the student. The benefits of positive

teacher-student relationships are replete in the literature (Anderman & Freeman, 2004;

Juvonen, 2006; Roeser, Midgely, & Urdan, 1996; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel,

1989, 1998) (cited in Faircloth, 2009, p. 323). To make a meaningful relationship

work effectively, I consider the words of St. Theresa (2001) “...fear makes me shrink

back, but love makes me come forward” (p. 101). Applied to the school setting, the

notion of a positive relationship between student and teacher is significant.

I agree with Kohl (1994) when he claims that “Nurturing children’s ability to imagine ways in which the world might be different is a gift we owe all children” (pp. 38-39). Telling intentional stories, that is, stories that have a specific purpose, is a means of promoting student engagement by creating a closer relationship with one’s students and making the learning experience happy. This is consistent with Noddings’ (2005) belief that we need to make the classroom a happy place for the learners. With storytelling pedagogy, for example, when a teacher tells a humorous or even serious and inspiring story about himself or herself, it is easier for students to see the humanity of the person at the front of the room. It promotes that treasured state of authenticity so essential to learning.

I believe that students have a right to learn something about the important people in their lives—their teachers, those with whom they spend a large portion of at least one year, and storytelling pedagogy may be one means to help the student relate to the teacher as a fellow human being. “Being aware of how teacher-student interaction (relations) can promote academic motivation may provide implications in a variety of areas for educators” (Rugutt, 2009, p. 18). Sharing a personal story with one’s students invokes a measure of intimacy; it is a sharing of oneself.

The following poem serves to illustrate an intimate experience that I have shared with my students over the years about my own struggle with dyslexia. Voicing

the struggle that I continue to have invites my students to be privileged sharers in my  
life.

*The [University Student] Card*

*It was grade two  
And I couldn't read  
Or even write.*

*I was smart  
But the letters were as scrambled  
as my eggs on the weekend.  
Try harder! Was the teacher's favourite mantra  
As I stared at the paper  
In a cloud of unknowing.*

*I knew I didn't like school  
I screamed it, in fact,  
though no one ever heard.*

*Dyslexia*

*Even the word sounds ugly  
Like torment, or remorse, or anguish.*

*A new school and laughter in the rooms  
A large woman outside the door.  
Smiles live on her face.*

*Hugs are her pedagogy  
Patience is her way  
And compassion her very nature.  
The insidious battle over jumbled letters  
And reversed word order  
Hard fought with patience, practice, and lots of hugs.*

*Getting my first student card at the university*

*On that island  
surrounded by the sea*

*I used to stare at the card sometimes  
High above on the top floor of the library  
And then I'd look out at the ocean and dream.  
I was here  
Further than I'd ever imagined  
Becoming a teacher  
Clapping for me?  
The silky gown of the graduands  
Academics all, even me, the factory worker's son.*

*The card comes with me now  
It is my shield against the dyslexia  
That stalks me still.  
I look at its picture on the card these days  
And the smiling face is old now  
But it's happy.*

*I show my student card to my children  
But like the house of one's own childhood  
The sense of wonder is lost to those who grew up elsewhere.*

*Drinking a pot of coffee  
As I read all night  
Pencil always at the ready, making notes  
I realize how tired I am;*

*I'm middle aged  
Yet, like a runner that knows he's winning and cannot give up  
I press forward.  
My card whispering to me  
You can do it, Dr. Lannan  
You just need to keep trying, I love you.*

*All we ever have is our name when we leave.  
Our excuses do not count*

*Was the job done or was it left unfinished?*

*Like a child entering into the world*

*The screams of the mother, willing to take the pain for her baby*

*The doctorate is my own labour of love.*

*My card*

*My reminder*

*My challenge*

*And my very deepest hope.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

Students are more engaged when the teacher is one whom they can trust and to whom they can relate. The literature (Anderman & Freeman, 2004; Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Juvonen, 2006; Roeser, Midgely, & Urdan, 1996; Ryan & Patrick, 2001; Wentzel, 1989, 1998 (cited in Faircloth, 2009, p. 323); Rugutt, 2009; Skinner, Marchand, Furrer, & Kindermann, 2008; Split & Koomen, 2009) supports the idea that positive teacher-student relationships are significant to learning engagement. Yonezawa et al., 2009 maintain that healthy teacher – student relationships in schools are very important to support students’ positive educational experience (Yonezawa et al., p. 192). Put succinctly, “...research on families and classrooms shows that the presence or absence of caring relationships affects whether an adolescent thrives or has problems” (Larson, Eccles, & Appleton Gootman, 2004, p. 8). However, Yonezawa et al., (2009) report that students are leaving high school before completion

[in the United States] in disturbingly large numbers, and the students that are dropping out report feeling alienated from their teachers (p. 192). These findings suggest that schools are in trouble. I believe that we need to change some things. One thing to change is the way we teach. Storytelling pedagogy would seem to be one specific way to promote student engagement by allowing the teacher to work more effectively with the student, by building a positive relationship based on trust, respect, and a mutual appreciation for stories.

The image of a committed teacher seeking to promote engagement with one's students through the use of a captivating story is evocative of a loving grandparent weaving a tale to enthrall the grandchildren. Told in a spirit of compassion and love, the story has the ability to reach the heart of its listeners through the shared interaction of its teller. "...Storytelling seeks to establish a connection between students and teachers" (Koenig and Zorn, 2002, p. 394).

During the telling of a story, the teacher needs to be highly observant of her audience (e.g. Roney, 1996), picking up non-verbal cues, looks, attentiveness, body language, a smile, etc. "In each true handshake there is a moment of mutuality which shuts out the rest of the world...Our eyes meet, and for an instant we are there only for each other" (van Manen, 1986, p. 22). The Latin expression *in loco parentis* succinctly identifies a teacher's position in the life of a student. It translates to

English as “in place of a parent” (retrieved from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com> Saturday, August 6, 2011). Yet, I rarely heard a teacher in my first dozen years of formalized education share with her or his students anything about his life, as though what the teacher’s life was about had nothing to do with the content being taught. I believe the opposite should be the norm.

The following poem is an attempt to show the merit of personalizing one’s teaching methodology and recognizing the relationship between a teacher’s own life and his teaching practice.

*Laughter cease!  
It’s time to learn!  
It is time for work!*

*And we all know that work must not be confused with  
or subjugated by  
Pleasure and play!  
Work time is serious!  
Eyes straight ahead  
Not a sound.*

*It’s a test!*

*This will make you better.  
Hours, sometimes days, go by—what was on that test?  
Glad I am done with that knowledge.  
Got an A on the test though.  
See how smart I am!*

*Will I be different?  
How can I?*

*I have been taught well  
I got all As:  
Routine, serious, rote  
Look what I can memorize!*

*Joyous, laughter.  
Effectively in control.  
We are not friends exactly.  
More, we are allies in the fight against apathy  
That is the real enemy;  
the one that does not care.*

*Running ahead of the cart,  
hearing the teacher's happy laugh  
Behind us, yet guiding us,  
like a warm wind lifting us upward.  
Never prouder than when we find our way  
Her infectious laugh because we are together again.*

*Our oasis--here in our classroom.  
Our classroom; our sacred space.  
This is holy ground.  
I am a doula; I assist with the birth of ideas.  
Our room is where we nurture, elevate, exalt, and raise  
The Ideas.*

*Gathered around our desks,  
Like villagers around a fire  
Hearing stories of our teacher's struggles and triumphs.  
She is human after all  
And speaks to us as a wise elder  
As one who has been there.*

*Truth is sought; community is forged.  
It means something to be here,  
to be a part of it.  
Who is this excellent person sharing with us  
Standing tall*

*Expecting us to do great things, not merely good--  
We are better than that,  
and we had better excel because she believes we can.  
Excel. I love that word.  
To go further and better than one could believe.  
To be better because of another person.*

*What a gift  
Honour  
Privilege  
To inspire and lead others in the direction of greatness.*

By Jeffery Lannan

As an educator with a high school audience, it is important for me to motivate, inspire, entice, lure—if need be, students to have a hunger for knowledge. Sheri Klein (2000) poses an important question when she asks, “What if the primary concerns of education offered possibilities for fulfillment, wonder, awe, joy, caring, compassion, and enchantment?” (p. 7). In response to her own question, Klein (2000) claims classrooms would become “places of power, where energies convene and create sites for healing” (Klein, 2000, p. 7); which Abbey (2004) calls “sacred spaces” (p. 2).

Consider Palmer’s (1998) appraisal of a good teacher: “Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a complex web of connections among themselves, their subjects, and their students so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves” (p. 11). Among the tools implied in that capacity to

connect is surely story telling. As Roney (2001) asserts, concerning the co-creative nature of storytelling, “The language (vocalization and gesturing) used by the teller creates a reaction by the audience members who communicate their reaction back to the teller via body language, facial expression, and sometimes overt vocalization” (p. 114). This is what the experienced teacher / storyteller may look for. It is a kind of “Nielsen Ratings” from the students that provides useful prompts for the experienced teller. It is also an opportunity to adopt a heightened sensitivity to one’s students, so necessary in building relationships, an opportunity to share a time of positive intimacy with one’s students. I regard this attention to behaviour in one’s students as a commitment and sensitivity on the part of the teacher to their needs and interests. I believe that the educator needs to become committed to identifying the depth of engagement of one’s students and needs to respond to the students through his own perception of their level of engagement to the story. It is another demonstration of the teacher’s own attention to the needs of her students and a verification of his or her willingness to do so. Students may see this depth of willingness through the teacher’s response and may be more inclined to acknowledge it and to honour that expression of care.

Burk (1997) asserts that “Storytelling is a constructed experience that involves both the listener and teller in a highly interactive and creative process” (p. 5). As such,

storytelling creates opportunity for relationship to be birthed, nurtured, and honoured in the classroom. In this way, storytelling pedagogy promotes student learning through relationship building with one's students. Lewis (2006) maintains that there is a vital relationship that exists between the story teller and the audience. "The story itself has life that is given to the teller and the listeners through the telling" (p. 831).

"Benton (1983) argues that in order to engage with a text, a reader must create a 'secondary world' in which he or she imagines, experiences, and elaborates on the story from within it. In this way, the engaged reader is a participant in the drama of the story rather than simply a spectator" (cited in Malin, 2010, p. 122). One may draw parallels with oral storytelling here, for when a storyteller is effectively telling a story, there may be a forging of relationship between the two, particularly when the teller modulates his voice, his tone and incorporates his body and facial expressions in order to connect with each student. Roney (1996) speaks of the special relationship between the storyteller and the audience.

The teller creates the story line and delivers it orally to the listeners, who then create mental images and deliver back to the teller reactions to the storyline. The reaction, in turn, affects the teller's choice of words, emphasis on plot development, and style of delivery. This co-creative interchange between teller and audience continues for the entirety of the story, thus marking storytelling as an act of communication. As communication, then, storytelling is interactive, immediate, and very personal—a negotiation between *this* teller and *this* audience and *this* place, never to be duplicated in precisely the

same way again. (p. 7)

Along my teaching journey, I have found that using narrative in the classroom has allowed me to create positive and meaningful relationships with the students that go beyond the traditional distant and objectified teacher-student relationship. I regard relationship with one's students as vital, and using story as one way to support that relationship. "Today, young people are often growing up alone, and so school remains one of the few places where they have opportunities to engage with influential adults" (Dunleavy & Milton, 2008, p. 4).

This is a story I have shared with students to encourage them when they are feeling defeated or lacking in energy for whatever reason.

#### *Uncle Roy*

*He was always old, but he always had a twinkle in his blue eyes. For what seemed like the whole of my entire lazy life, I never visited him. He always came to our home and sometimes, usually at **Christmas**, would stay overnight. I was always thrilled when he came over; my siblings and I would wait by the front window for ages just waiting for the first sign of him coming down the street. He always wore a baggy raincoat and a flat cloth cap, like an Irish Detective Colombo.*

*He was always smiling and always had a story to tell. He would sit in my kitchen for hours telling stories with my mom. His stories with my mom were of little*

*interest to us little ones, but he was such a good and decent guy that we were thrilled to have him with us. I remember, in my late teen years I became a kind of brooding and difficult person. I was sort of jealous that so many of my friends and colleagues at high school seemed to know what they were going to do with their lives in the next few months following graduation. Almost all were headed off to posh sounding universities. This seemed like an unattainable goal, as my father worked in a factory and that seemed like the expected destination for the rest of us. To us, the blue collar folk, university sounded like an exclusive country club, unwelcoming to the likes of us.*

*One Friday my mother encouraged me to spend a couple of days at my uncle's house in the East End of the city. I found myself in the east side, the place where my Mom's grandparents had settled, the place that was still filled with so many desperate and anxious new Canadians trying to make a go of it. I got off the bus down the street from his house, the place where my mom had grown up and had lived with her brother, her parents, her aunt, her cousin, and her grandmother all under one roof. I embraced this house as a kind of family Hall of Fame. I had heard so many stories about my mom's family over the years, but this was my link to the memory of these fine, good people. Mostly, what made my visit with my uncle so memorable that weekend so many long years ago was what happened to me the next day.*

*After a good, hot breakfast, my uncle suggested we go for a walk around the*

*neighbourhood. Now the East End, at least at that time, 25 years ago, seemed to be suffering from urban decay. There were decrepit buildings and threatening looking groups of hard young people ready to defend their territory. As we walked, I became more distressed that the innocence and charm of my boyhood's memory of this neighbourhood had been lost for good. I was becoming depressed, when my uncle stopped and said,*

*"Do you see that tree over there?"*

*"Yes," I said, looking at a gigantic maple.*

*Before I could utter a youthful, "So what?" my uncle said, "I remember the day they planted that tree. My friends and I happened to be playing right in the next field and came over to see if the farmer wanted any help."*

*I took a closer look at that tree that stood about 80 feet high and then at the decrepit houses all around it and tried to envision farmers' fields and innocent kids offering to help plant some trees in his fields; it was a stretch. We walked on some more and came to a busy intersection. Cars of all sizes and shapes loudly raced through the light. As we were waiting, and I was stewing about how loudly many of the cars blared their stereos, my uncle again, turned to me and said,*

*"See that black chain fence?"*

*"Sure," I said, "Why?"*

*My uncle seemed lost for a moment as he stared at this heavy chain connected by two ancient looking pillars. Finally he said, "That was great play thing for us as kids. We used to swing on that chain and tight rope walk across it, as though we were circus performers."*

*What a smile he had as he said those words! It was a smile of innocent tenderness for a gentler time, when stuff like that meant something. The chain was his link to a gentler time when the world had more time for such things and cars did not move so quickly.*

*We were heading back to his home when we saw a thing that I will remember all my life. As we walked down a side street, we travelled on one of those roads that make you feel as though you've left the city and its rush and noise behind, one of those streets whose porches all have cozy looking chairs, as if the folks that own them know how to enjoy themselves. It was a street with great, tall trees, like my uncle's maple, that provide shade on a summer's day, where folks might be overheard singing as they wash their cars. It was a very different vibe, one that lifted me out of my sadness over the changes to the area of my mother's childhood.*

*It was on this street, two blocks from my uncle's home that we saw the unthinkable! There, sticking out of a garage, running the length of the driveway and almost out to the road, was a canoe being formed out of a tree. Here was a white*

*haired man carving a tree into a canoe all by himself! My uncle put his hands on his hips and laughed in a joyful fashion while I just stared and kept repeating, “No way!”*

*“No way!”*

*The man looked up and smiled and said, “What do you think?”*

*My uncle said it was fantastic and asked how long had he been working on it.*

*The man said, “Off and on for a few months now. It should be finished by the end of the summer.”*

*I don't know why, but I wanted to cry. I had found an oasis. No, it was better than that. I had found truth. Here was truth and beauty, allowed to flourish wherever it damn well wanted. Nothing could stop this man. His love for his craft was too great. It was pure, like the smell of laundry dried by the sun in May. My uncle and I talked with this craftsman, who in a different time and place may have been an artisan working for the Medici family in Florence. We shook his hand--my uncle loved to shake hands with people.*

*When we finally left, it was as though a rainbow had shone high above the city's East End that day, towering above to veil my mother's home in a seal of grace and to cleanse my own judgmental nature to help me see things a bit more clearly.*

In my teaching practice I have found that students tend to see through any façade I may have erected on a given day. “...Good teaching involves letting your

life speak, that who you are as a person comes through how you act” (Palmer, 1998, p. 212,). I have found that in life and in teaching, it is prudent to operate from a foundation of honesty and sincerity. In this way, my genuine and, ideally, likeable personality will emerge. “When students like a teacher they experience motivational and achievement benefits” (Montalvo et al., 2007, p. 144). My belief is that a teacher may benefit from being himself or herself in the classroom, which may help her to connect with her students. “Having a positive relationship with one’s teacher may be a factor that promotes positive outcomes and ameliorates risk for students who may be considered at-risk for negative outcomes such as school dropout” (Decker, 2007, p. 3). Though narration can be an effective pedagogical practice, one needs to be mindful of the intention of the story one shares. “...you have to go deeper than just presenting the stories” (Kidd & Finlayson, 2009, p. 983)

The teacher may bring passion to the classroom; what the teacher is saying and teaching ideally will be their passion, because it is a part of the teacher’s life. “Everybody lives autobiographically, all the time. We make sense of our lives in stories” (Leggo, 2008a, p. 9). I think it is appropriate for the teacher to offer the students what he or she knows best and to share some her experiences with the students, rather than ignoring what may be a reservoir of untapped riches. Experiences that happened on vacation, or an account of someone whom he or she

may have once met, or even a funny or interesting experience that happened while walking the dog one morning may make for an engaging story to share with the students. Aoki (1991) maintains the teacher himself *is* the teaching.

Storytelling pedagogy is also useful as a means of connecting students' work in the class to the greater community around them. In her novel, *Ancient Futures*, Helena Norberg-Hodge (cited in Mortenson & Oliver-Relin, 2006) talks about the need to examine purpose and implications of things. That might be sage advice for teachers consumed with *teaching to the test*, teachers whose perception of student progress is narrow and restrictive of the students' humanity. 'I used to assume that the direction of progress was somehow inevitable...I have learned that there is more than one path into the future and I have had the privilege to witness another, saner way of life--a pattern of existence based on the co-evolution between human beings and the earth' (cited in Mortenson & Oliver-Relin, 2006, p. 112). A surprising number of students whom I have taught had no idea about preparing for the work force; their naiveté impressed upon me the danger of making false assumptions about what our students really do know and what they will bring with them to the *real* (post school) *world*. I believe that part of the success in educating a person, particularly a teenager, is seeking to know the students' world and how they locate themselves in their world. "As a teacher I learned that, for students to be successful, I needed to listen to their

needs, enter *their* reality, and come to understand where they are” (Roth, 2002, p. xv).

Storytelling pedagogy that employs creative, topical, relevant stories from the teacher’s own life is one means for the teacher to connect with the life of the students’ world that the teacher can never really be a part of. It is a creative opportunity for engagement. Stories may provide a lead-in that generates discussion amongst the students, to hear their hopes, dreams, and fears, by getting the students to tell their own stories.

“I compare my... [use of storytelling in the classroom with high school students’]...understandings with others to reveal similarities and differences” (Renne, 2003, p. 79). Stories are the bridge to our common humanity; they are the means of establishing a connection with the other; and ultimately to promoting greater student engagement in the classroom. A shared story is an invitation to engagement. “What is of interest...is the aspect of immediacy that makes written autobiographies, and probably even more so oral accounts of so-called personal experience, thus seizing and taking possession of the reader/audience” (Bamberg, 2006, p. 140). Sometimes I make up poems with my students about people in the world of work. Sometimes the stories are silly, sometimes sad, sometimes about things that scared me. I invited my students to do the same. It is not about making the perfect poem. It is about how we are when we are doing something out of school.

*Dr. Rifen*

*He was a dentist  
this person named Dr. Rifen.  
He scared us more than anyone  
even when our teeth were right.*

*He was, somehow, a children's dentist.  
He was not kind or even gentle.  
Had we known what a war criminal was,  
we would have thought him that.*

*Dr. Rifen was as gentle as a lion eating an elk.  
His dental skill was matched only by his way with kids.  
He had two childlike pictures hanging in his office:  
one was a faded dinosaur, the other a frightened-looking deer.*

*Dr. Rifen had a couple of degrees  
but he had no soul.  
He knew how to take dental x-rays  
but not how to talk with children.*

*Dr. Rifen worked four days a week  
and only four hours a day.  
anxious, perhaps, to be somewhere else,  
doing something he liked better.*

*I remember once showing fear in his office.  
Be quiet, it doesn't hurt, he offered me.  
I had the voice of a child and he could not hear.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

When I consider the value of connecting with students, I am reminded of the words of Henry David Thoreau: "The finest qualities of our nature, like the boom on fruits, can be preserved only by the most delicate handling. Yet we do not treat

ourselves nor one another thus tenderly” (Thoreau, 2004, p. 116). The teacher must treat his or her students tenderly by inviting them to share their stories, for unless the students do this, the teacher can never understand them.

The number of children raised in households without a biological father present has doubled since 1960 and has quadrupled since the 1950s, numbering one out of three in 2000 (Wineburg, 2000). One study suggests that roughly 50% of children in the United States will live apart from their biological fathers at some point during their childhood (Bumpass & Sweet, 1989). Most family researchers agree that children are better off growing up with two parents. (cited in Jago, 2006, p. 417)

As we become more and more aware of the changing social dynamic in modern Western society, we educators are aware that more and more weight seems to be imposed upon the shoulders of the teaching community to help these and all children. The teacher can only help the children if the teacher connects with them in a meaningful dialogue.

Stories are a means by which to establish a connection with the other. I agree with Egan (1997) when he suggests that “what makes others’ lives interesting to us is the degree to which we can imaginatively grasp them in terms of the emotions, hopes, fears, and intentions we can share” (pp. 259-260). When storytelling is used effectively and draws from events in the teacher’s own life, both students and teachers are united to the characters in the stories we share by our common humanity. This

claim is supported by Skouge & Rao (2009). “We are passionate about storytelling. It is through stories that we share our common humanity” (p. 59). And it is his means that I propose to use to connect with the student. “There is a spiritual reciprocity in story, the spirit of the story and the spirit of the teller converge and become one at that moment of telling” (Lewis, 2006, p. 831). Through my teaching career, I have witnessed this reciprocity, a spiritual one, even - perhaps, one in which time and space seem to be altered in the glow created by the simple beauty of a story being crafted and shared. The following is an exemplar of the type of story I speak of, one that serves to support oneness “at that moment of telling.”

### *Meeting a Holy Man*

*Years ago, I moved to Ottawa to complete my Master’s degree. I found a little house to rent between the Rideau Canal and St. Paul University. Both were three minutes away. I walked along the canal to U. of O. early each morning. I was always the very first person to enter the education building so that I could get to work on my papers and research. It was one of the most glorious periods of my life. It was pure bliss, being able to study every single day and attend classes!*

*It was around this time that I heard that there were interesting lectures given every Friday evening at St. Paul’s. It was really quite an eclectic series; there were talks by famous heart surgeons, political people, religious scholars etc. Because it*

*was the Nation's capital, they could bring in some real talent.*

*One Friday night I happened to be bored and found myself at St. Paul's and went to hear the speaker. I didn't know anything about him, other than that he was some kind of a holy man from India. I was lucky to have arrived early because the seats quickly filled up and people began lining up against the walls to hear this person speak. When he entered, he quietly walked across the stage, unhurriedly and seemingly unaware of the five thousand people who were watching his every move. When he began to speak, it was as though he was speaking to each one as individual. We might well have been in his living room, gathered around the floor with an old friend. He wore a kind of yellow and orange sari that left one of his shoulders exposed. This was at the height of an Ottawa winter.*

*He talked about the need to work together and be happy as we set about our work. Nothing he said was original but everything he said made perfect sense. I later learned that he had built hospitals, schools, and bridges that united villages in his country; but he talked about none of his achievements that night, yet that he was a holy and even saintly being was very evident in that room.*

*At the end of his talk many people were crying; he had spoken to the heart of his audience. This was a person I knew I had to meet. It's funny how often I think that I am so different from my fellow human being; but as I went to approach the stage at*

*the end of his talk, I was surprised to see how many others had the same idea as I. Whatever else God may have made me, He didn't make me great for line ups, so I left. And as I headed out of the building I realized that I really did want to meet this exceptional person, so I thought about where he had to exit to get to the parking lot. Like a benevolent stalker, I went over to the side area by the main parking lot. I waited about 35 minutes before I saw the great man coming down the hall with, I supposed, his driver or host. Here was my chance to have the sage all to myself and get the meaning of life!*

*As he got closer, I again noticed his beautiful sari and then looked out at the frenzied snow blowing across the parking lot on this cold winter's night. All my self interest vanished as I thought about this good man getting cold outside. I met him by the doors and said,*

*"Excuse me, Sir, would you please borrow my jacket so you won't get cold?"*

*He thanked me warmly and said, "No, thank you."*

*All the love I had ever felt in my heart welled up for this gentle soul and I took off my scarf and handed it to him and said, "Then at least please take my scarf with you."*

*He put the scarf on, bowed his head and I thought I saw his lips moving before he took it off and gently put it around my neck, the way a mother might cover a new*

*born with a blanket. He looked right into my eyes, into my very soul, and said, "I bless you."*

*It was one of those moments frozen in time. He looked at me for a few seconds and smiled and then walked off into the Ottawa night, as unaware of the cold and snow as he had been of the crowd of people watching him earlier. I stood there for the longest time feeling as though I had just spoken to God himself.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

When I tell that story to my students they always beg me to bring in the scarf, as though it had some magical properties or something. I can understand why. It had been blessed by a holy man.

The importance of connecting with the student cannot be overstated. "Accumulating evidence demonstrates that warm and open teacher-child relationships foster children's social-emotional and academic functioning" (Split & Koomen, 2009, p. 86). Faircloth (2009) takes the importance of healthy interpersonal relationships even further. "...The need for belonging (defined as the need to form at least one minimum quantity of affectively positive connections within one's context) is so prevalent and far reaching, that it dominates an individual's emotion, cognition, behavior, and health" (Faircloth, 2009, p. 322). Skinner et al (2008) also remind us of the importance of positive student-teacher relationships. "The quality of student-

teacher relationships, in the form of caring, supportive alliances, is a key predictor of academic engagement, effort in the classroom, school liking, and achievement expectancies” (p. 768). In all my years in elementary and high school, with one exception, I cannot remember ever having a teacher tell me or my fellow students that we were precious and valuable. Storytelling with one’s students can allow a teacher to show her students, through a look, a smile, or even through the tone used in the story that he or she cares about the students.

Through storytelling pedagogy, the teacher may also connect with the student by demonstrating that the classroom is a special place, where the teacher can take time out and share a rich and engaging story, replete with all of the literary devices like rising action, foreshadowing, climax etc., as a means of unifying us in our special place. Baskerville (2011) lends support for the value of storytelling pedagogy as a means for creating a unique atmosphere in the classroom by suggesting that storytelling helps to create a classroom atmosphere that is both peaceful and welcoming (Baskerville, p. 113). Hilder (2005) concurs with my belief that stories told in a classroom have the ability to build cohesion. “Storytelling does indeed have the power to foster inclusivity in ways that objectivist pedagogy cannot because storytelling engages the imagination and the emotions” (Hilder, p. 159).

Faircloth (2009) takes the discussion regarding the importance of positive

relationships for students in an interesting direction when she informs us that “Students that feel connected to school report higher levels of emotional well-being” (p. 327). The relationship that one has with one’s students may be one of the pillars upon which a healthy and stimulating education is built.

One of the most important lessons I have learned is that the relationship between teacher and student is at the heart of good teaching. I have learned that good teachers are centrally concerned with the creation of authentic relationships and a classroom environment in which students can make connections between the curriculum of the classroom and the central concerns of their lives. (Beattie, 2001, p. 3)

Levin (2005) makes a salient point when he says that “students have unique knowledge and perspectives [in the school itself]” (p. 156). I want my students and *myself* to celebrate our unique knowledge and perspectives, in our shared world of magical understanding, where ideas are discovered and worlds are created. I used to call my classroom a ship. I would tell students walking down the hall to hurry that we were setting sail in a moment and not to miss the boat. It was a further example of the importance of our special time together, as well as further evidence that a student’s presence was important.

The repertoire of stories that I draw upon has a diverse range of subject matters, locations, and genres. Stories about sports, travel, the arts, and interesting people almost always manage to connect with an interest of most students. And I

contend that that may be one goal in educating young people: to connect with each student and treat them all as equally special. One may be reminded of the advice Shaw's character, Professor Higgins gives in his play, *Pygmalion*. "The great secret, Eliza, is not having bad manners or good manners or any other particular sort of manners, but having the same manner for all human souls; in short, behaving as if you were in Heaven, where there are no third-class carriages, and one soul is as good as another" (Shaw, 2008, p. 112).

Akkerman et al. 2008 assert that the use of storytelling has a long and established reputation for giving structure and cognizance to experiences (Akkerman et al., p. 449). When one shares a story, for example, of a time when one felt they were treated unfairly such as the one I shared in "Meeting the Queen", it is useful for meaning making and ultimately for connecting with one's students, as most young people may have felt treated unfairly at some point in their young lives.

The relationship between the teacher and the student is a fundamental component to any discussion regarding student learning. Could this, then, be part of the teacher's mandate? If students are not connecting with their teacher, if they cannot see a positive, healthy, even meaningful relationship, students may either tolerate their classroom experience and get through it, or they may disengage, and valuable time and effort may be wasted.

When a student can see the humanity of a lesson through a story it becomes more interesting and relevant to his/her own existence. “Through story, the interactions between people are revealed...Story provides examples of social contexts in which children can see real-life relationships between themselves and others being acted out and resolved in the literary world” (Mallan, 1991, p. 12). Storytelling is one way that students may learn how their teacher has had to deal with a real-life situation that might be part of their own experience. Thus, students might benefit from the wisdom of the lesson without having had to endure the pain of the experience. This notion also finds support in the literature (Abma, 2003; Aguirre, 2005; Egan, 1989; Egan, 1992; Haitch & Miller, 2006; Jensen, 2004; King, 2003; Roney, 2001; Shank, 2006; van Manen, 1986).

One of the goals in using storytelling pedagogy in the classroom may be to promote engagement in the students, not simply with me but with others in and outside the class and with the curriculum. I believe that storytelling is one way to promote engagement because “Storytelling is ingrained in the fabric of human life” (Harris, 2007, p. 111). The majority of Canadian students typically spend one third of each day, five days a week for 12 years—to simply complete their basic education. It is troubling to me that this experience will be anything less than rewarding and happy. Yet, we know that this is typically not the case.

Close to 25 percent of youth who enter Canadian high schools do not graduate within the standard twelve years of schooling. Even among those who do, many have a low sense of belonging, low participation rates, and lower achievement rates as they progress through secondary school. (Dunleavy & Milton, 2008, p. 2)

What is particularly interesting to me is that the challenge of engaging students in school has been examined for years. “For decades, educators, social scientists, and researchers over the years have studied what aspects of schools and classrooms engage and disengage generations of youth” (Achieve 2004, 2005; Blum and Libbey 2004; Tyack and Cuban 1995, cited in Yonezawa et al, 2009).

Engaging the student with the teacher, with other students in class, and with the curriculum in high school is important. The literature suggests that relationships in school play a particularly crucial role in promoting socially competent behavior in the classroom and in fostering academic engagement and achievement (Fredricks, Blumfeld, & Paris, 2004; Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Hill & Madhere, 1996; National Research Council, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2007 cited in Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009, p. 717). Too often school is perceived as boring, and “Being bored means being detached” (Breidenstein, 2007, p. 93). If a child is not engaged with the learning experience, the student may be at a decided disadvantage, in terms of what they will gain from the classroom experience, other than failure and a bitter experience.

The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) (2000) identifies student engagement “to refer to students’ attitudes towards schooling and their participation in school activities” (p. 8). The point of this dissertation is that school is precisely a place which young people should love to attend and learn to embrace the myriad opportunities that are offered them. Student engagement (in the form of wonder and awe) using storytelling pedagogy could be taught, so that it may lead to greater student learning. Ideally this may lead students to become lifelong students with a hunger for knowledge. Thomas Groome (2001) believes that “Life itself is ‘continuing education,’ and the educator needs to regard everyone as a ‘lifelong learner’ who is ever capable of growing into the fullness of life” (p. 97). If students are not engaged, they may lose interest in their education: “...research has also documented a steady decline in students’ engagement with schooling, including their interest, enthusiasm, and intrinsic motivation for learning in school...” (Skinner et al., 2008, p. 765).

This dissertation is fueled by the fact that too often I have seen, been a part of, and have even taught courses that were tedious, fact filled, and void of anything that would promote student engagement. Snowber (2005) crystallizes my point. “...life’s circumstances...precipitated them [scholars] to investigate their particular life circumstances as their research. Here is where their passion soared, where they could

marry theory and practice and explore the relationship between real-life events, and how it affected their teaching practice” (p. 347). Well told stories, fueled by a teacher’s passion about science, mathematics or language may be a conduit for releasing this passion and passing it on, in order to promote student engagement.

Maltby & Mackie (2009) raise an interesting consideration when examining the challenges in supporting and maintaining student engagement in the modern classroom. “A study by Smart et al. (1999) discovered that in comparison to undergraduates surveyed 10 years before, undergraduates of the day were more bored in class, more often over-slept and missed classes or appointments and were less likely to study or do homework for six or more hours a week” (cited in Maltby & Mackie, 2009, p. 52). Smart et al.’s study concludes from their finding that, “We need, therefore, to take into account that today’s students may be different to those who attended university before the advent of e-learning” (cited in Maltby & Mackie, 2009, p. 52). Granted, the Smart et al. (1999) study looked at a post-secondary sample, but nevertheless, the study introduces the notion of the technologies available to learners anywhere. For the group that concerns this discussion, it is interesting to consider the competing role that technology (in the form of cell phones, internet, iPods, and email—to name a few) plays in the lives of high school students. Gadgets that may be brought into class (e.g., cell phones for text messaging or iPods) may be

more interesting than a teacher lecturing in front of the class. Perhaps more than ever, education needs to benefit from the power of narrative to promote student engagement.

Another impediment to engaging the student with the teacher may be found in the inherent design structures that can impede the relationship between the teacher and the student that can affect the students' engagement. "Basic structures of schooling in the middle and secondary school-from timetables to class groupings and teacher assignments-can often mitigate against the kind of [positive] relationships and classroom practices that we described" (Dunleavy et al. 2008, p. 5). The above observation simply provides greater impetus for recognizing the need to use a storytelling pedagogy to promote genuine student learning; when a teacher can catch the eye of a student while he / she is telling a story, or share an innocent smile, or laugh together with one's class, a meaningful connection is made and a relationship is born.

My reason for wanting to implement storytelling pedagogy to promote student engagement is largely motivated by the currently dismal success rate for engaging our young people in the classroom. Jardine, Clifford, & Friessen (2003) believe that schools tend to be rather boring places, from an intellectual point of view, and not just for the students but also for the teachers (Jardine, Clifford, and Friessen, p. 92).

Martin (2008) reports that ‘Extensive studies in the United States point to a steep decline in motivation amongst high school students with some 40% claiming that they have little or no interest in schooling’ (cited in McInerney, 2009, p. 23). This situation is echoed by Kortering and Christenson (2009).

Our research consistently shows that the most prominent motivation for wanting to be in school is a student’s perception that in some way it is preparing him or her for what he or she considers a productive adulthood (Kortering, Konold, & Glutting, 1999; Kortering & Konold, 2005), yet most students report not seeing how their work in school relates to their future career. (p. 11)

Are we *teaching* our young at the cost of their playful and joyful nature?

Miley (2009) suggests students that have a genuine interest in the classroom will also likely be engaged with the material presented (Miley, p. 358). I am not suggesting that the teacher seek to become a jester or a mere entertainer of her students; rather, one should consider learning to be a serious business, though one which may be done with an element of playfulness in order to engage the student. Dewey (1991) argues for the presence of both the playful and serious in the classroom: “To be playful and serious at the same time is possible, and it defines the ideal mental condition” (p. 218). Decker (2007) contends that a playful attitude, like one brought about by a teacher’s honest and potentially humorous stories, advances the learning process. “The more students play, the more they *can* play. The more they play, the more they

trust that their imaginations are a valuable source of both data and energy to bring to a new task. The more they play, the more they realize the contingent nature of what they know, however, they realize it without fear” (Decker, 2007, p. 6). Many of the stories that I share with students are humorous and tell of silly things that I did as a child, such as eating egg shells or tobogganing off the roof of my house. The subsequent poem provides an exemplar of sharing a recollection of something innocent and silly from my past.

*A Snowball's Chance*

*Years ago, I almost became a priest.  
My dream was to become Bing Crosby, at least the one from the movies,  
where he's always playing ball with the kids.  
He was my kind of guy:  
One that could sing or share a laugh,  
and give serious wisdom to the urchins in the street.*

*I even lived in a monastery for a couple of years.  
We used to pray a lot  
And feed the poor.  
From the roof I could see the ocean.  
From my bedroom I could see an open field  
I thought I was in heaven.*

*My room was the smallest;  
I thought I'd get a start on poverty.  
It was also right beside the washroom.*

*I lived there with seven other mostly holy people.  
Two were priests  
And two were from England with a passionate thirst for beer*

*And the rest were young men from Newfoundland  
The quietest and most diabolical was one we called  
Hellraiser.*

*Hellraiser was doubly blessed:  
He had an inexhaustible capacity for talking about his swimming prowess.  
He also had an inexhaustible supply of practical jokes.*

*As we were all given our own rooms,  
Hellraiser felt it best to systematically torment  
each of us with practical jokes.*

*For some the toilet would be Saran-wrapped,  
for others they would have their doors taped closed;  
and for me it was a full out snowball attack at my bedroom window.  
Fortunately, I was on the second floor  
And Hellraiser and the others required greater effort to launch  
their snowballs at my window.*

*I laughed and encouraged them  
As I filled a washbasin with cold water.  
And then dared them to get closer.*

*Like a medieval knight protecting his castle  
I let the infidels get theirs.  
Swish it came over the castle wall.  
Shrieks of terror mixed with surprise  
As they pled vengeance  
But not before I ran to lock the front door.*

*Boom, boom, boom the sound echoed throughout the monastery.  
"I wonder who that could be?"  
I said from the warm side of the door.*

*Good naturedly, I let them in 20 minutes later  
Convinced that they had met their match.*

*Little did I guess that my waterfall attack*

*would later inspire one of the Englishmen.*

*“Right, Mate”, he said with a thick Liverpool accent  
“He’s a great swimmer and all that  
Let’s find out!”*

*“What do you mean,” I asked, genuinely puzzled.  
“Let’s fill the turkey pot with water and douse ‘Ellraiser proper.”  
and then he smiled contentedly at his ironical plan.  
“Great.” I said, feeling the power of it all.  
So one early Saturday morning  
We spent a half hour filling a forty five gallon turkey basin.*

*We trudged up stairs sloshing the water two and fro  
Straining to get to Hellraiser’s room  
Without waking him.*

*Creeping in after dawn  
We lifted the great basin of water  
And began to swing it from side to side.*

*“Before we drown him, let’s give him a chance.”  
I said, so Damien shouted  
“Hey, ‘Ellraiser!!!”  
Hellraiser opened just one eye as the first wave crested over him  
And left him reeling in his water bed  
Shifting and surging with the man-made tsunami.*

*We dropped the empty basin and turned to flee  
as Hellraiser launched himself out of bed in one movement:  
Too quickly I’m afraid.  
He hit a wet patch  
and I noticed his legs rise over his shoulders  
as he seemed to hang in the air for the longest time,  
while I delayed my escape.*

*I watched until he landed  
And then sped down the hall*

*Feeling joyous yet terrified that it was Hellraiser we had so ravaged,  
We ran hard and fast*

*Curiously, at our every snake-like turn  
Hellraiser slipped dramatically,  
like a speed skater with the dullest blades.  
Kaboom, he would land, loudly pledging greater mayhem.  
We led him like a disoriented moose to the back of the house;  
then we ran outside before circling around and back into the warmth.  
Amazingly, Hellraiser had been duped again.*

*Boom, boom, boom, went the monastery doors.  
We called one of the holy men to help see who might be knocking at this early hour.*

*The holy man answered the door and greeted Hellraiser's wrath  
With his own brand of warmth and kindness.  
"Michael, were you out jogging?"*

*"No, Father, the boys soaked me with a bathtub of water  
while I was sleeping,"  
he said, dripping all over the place.*

*"Best get to changed now Michael.  
There's a good fellow".  
Fits of laughter were heard in the background.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

Leggo (2008b) asserts the need for blending the personal and professional. His argument for such is that "...we live personally, and our personal living is always braided with our other ways of living-professional..." (Leggo, 2008b p. 91). Leggo is quick to underscore the demands of such writing in the academy, one that is often fueled by cold empirical data.

“All of my autobiographical research is about the construction of identity, especially in the spaces between the self and subjectivity” (Leggo, 2008b, p. 92). To support/clarify his position, the author cites Griffin (1995) who talks about the relational aspect of humanity. ‘...to know the self is to enter a social process’ (cited in Leggo, 2008b p. 92). This has resonance for me, as the aspect of relationship emerges as a central theme in my work of promoting student engagement through storytelling pedagogy.

Engagement may be thought of in terms of degree. I believe that a professional educator may aspire to an engagement that enters the realm of wonder and awe. I contend that a teenager that looks forward to going into a classroom, to anticipate what may turn into a magical experience is more engaged than a student that must be convinced that he or she must get to school and simply do the dull, meaningless work assigned in order to get to university or get a job or some other meaningful pursuit. Newman (1992) raises an important yet disturbing consideration regarding student engagement:

The most immediate and persisting issue for students and teachers is not low achievement, but student disengagement. The most obviously disengaged students disrupt classes, skip them, or fail to complete assignments. More typically, disengaged students behave well in school. They attend class and complete the work, but show little indication of excitement, commitment, or pride in mastery of the curriculum. (p. 2)

Buchanan and Hyde, 2008 suggest that "...barriers to effective teaching can be dismantled by a teacher's recognizing the interplay of the cognitive, affective and spiritual dimensions of learning" (p. 312). I suggest that a good story may move us in a host of ways. "I feel we tell stories because they impact us *emotionally* [author's italics]; they make us feel differently than we did prior to hearing them" (Sturm, 2008, p. 13).

The importance of interesting and engaging storytelling may be juxtaposed with Egan's (1997) assessment of adolescence. "Early adolescence is commonly a time of intense and vivid emotional life, and also a time of intense boredom and depression" (p. 227). Given this reality, storytelling pedagogy may promote student engagement because it provides a context for young people seeking their way in the world. "...stories give us meaning and value to the places we call home...they bring us close to the world we live in by taking us into the world of words...they hold us together and at the same time keep us apart" (Chamberlin, 2006, p. 1). Story telling seems to "humanize" our relationship so that they can talk to the process of learning with me in a more personal and real manner. It opens doors to dialogue.

Egan (1992) suggests one cause for school being regarded as boring is that bad teaching is simply perpetuated: "Students who show not one iota of imagination and who seem guaranteed to bore generations of students mindless but who prove

competent users of the approved management skills routinely pass into the teaching profession” (pp. 154-155). The problem of uninspiring teachers is further compounded for the motivated learners in the classroom, those that really do want to learn, despite who is teaching them. “Over time, disinterested students often compromise interested students’ ability to learn and increase the difficulty of classroom management” (Byrnes, 1997, Enduring Themes in Social Studies Teaching section, para. 6).

It is almost a minor miracle that students can sit in one spot for 72 minutes (in my school) at a time and listen to something delivered in a disengaging fashion which too often happens in secondary classrooms today. The great jazz saxophonist Charlie Parker once said, “If you don’t live it, it won’t come out of your horn” (retrieved from <http://www.quotes.prolix.nu/Music> on Tuesday, August 16, 2011).

The idea that a teenager listening--or appearing to listen--politely (hopefully) to a teacher that lectures or lectures dispassionately should not be confused with the idea that students like it. Legault et al (2006) claims “Individuals become more self-determined as they internalize to a greater extent their reasons for executing a given behavior” (p. 567). When students can be engaged through a story told by their teacher, it is easier for students to engage or re-engage more deeply into what the teacher has to offer in terms of the curriculum. At the same time, when hearing a

story, a student may clarify his or her own sense of self by measuring his or her own reaction to the narrative against that of the teacher. “Theory and research suggest that adolescents are intensely involved in identity development (Erikson, 1968; Harter, 1990; Marcia, 1980 cited in Faircloth, 2009), a focus that could shape their reaction to any context” (Faircloth, 2009, p. 322). Sharing inspiring or simply silly stories that reveal the humanity of the teacher, for example, a time when the teacher had to overcome a great challenge, may help to shape a student’s reaction to his or her own environment. The teacher and the curriculum may no longer be identified as boring; rather, the classroom and all that it offers may be transformed into a satisfying place of self-discovery and realization. The teacher should never forget that “We are fundamentally *homo narrans*—humans as storytellers” (Goodall, 2005, p. 497).

Stories told in the classroom may also serve to help students to engage with each other by nurturing a sense of community within the classroom. “Each story increases the awareness of others regarding human experience and the desire to establish a connection with the social fabric” (Aguirre, 2005 p. 148). Coaches, for example, have long understood the need for team cohesiveness, common purpose, and a close knit sense of community on their teams, through team slogans, cheers, and by passing along stories of the heroic deeds of former players through oral tradition. Similarly, a classroom that shares a sense of understanding and community has a

better chance of being a successful learning place. “One person’s story becomes another person’s story with subtle differences” (Harris, 2007, p. 111). I think what Harris means by this is that stories are a conduit for students to recognize their commonalities with their teacher and their classmates which may help to promote unity in the classroom. “The Digital Storytelling Association (2002)” [recognizes] ‘throughout history, storytelling has been used to share knowledge, wisdom, and values’” (cited in Sadik, 2008, p. 490). When I consider the unifying potential of storytelling, I am reminded of the line by C.S. Lewis (1955), when he says, “Nothing, I suspect, is more astonishing in any man’s life than the discovery that there do exist people very, very like himself” (p. 152).

Storytelling pedagogy may help to forge community by helping students to recognize their similarities. Shakespeare’s plays still appeal to audiences around the world because emotions like love, fear, courage, and anger are timeless and universal. Many of the stories that I tell in the classroom have timeless paradigms in them as well. I believe that it may be easy for all to recognize the meanness of a Mrs. Russell after hearing about her treatment of little kids (in *Meeting the Queen*) or to laugh at Peter Hallen (in *Peter Hallen*) upon learning that, as an adult, he still barks at people. Students respond to the universal emotion of such stories as a collective—with the rest of their classmates; and in this manner, the stories may be regarded as a unifying

agent to help engage students with one another.

Using engaging, topical stories, particularly autobiographical stories that have direct connection with the lesson at hand may be one way to engage the student with the curriculum. While the curriculum needs to be taught, it is of course up to the discretion of the teacher how to creatively implement it.

If we understand our lived experiences as unfolding possible worlds within which learning emerges, we must then pay attention to how we engage in pedagogical encounters, and how we choose to interact with our students within what becomes a co-evolving curriculum of possibilities (Fels, 1999, p. 78).

The teacher's role in adopting appropriate strategies is further emphasized by Rugutt (2009): "Teachers can likely restructure the teaching and learning environment by providing different learning strategies to students and finding ways to motivate student[s] to learn and to engage them in active learning" (p. 18). Storytelling may be one way to engage the student with the curriculum.

While teaching the novel, *The Outsiders* by S.E. Hinton to a grade 9 English class, I may choose to engage students with the curriculum by telling them a story that happened to me in the ninth grade. It is a story that relates to the novel's major themes of friendship and loyalty.

*When I was growing up, there was a family in my neighbourhood that I liked very much. There were five children in the family: all boys, each one tougher than the*

*next. They were kind and friendly with my brothers and me, but if someone crossed any of them, that person had to fight all of the brothers. They were loyal and they stuck together. The toughest of the brothers was named Robert, and he was my age and in my grade.*

*As the long days of summer holidays came to an end, it was time to go to a new school: high school! It was a brand new school, with many first year teachers, many of whom looked rather nervous.*

*I remember it as if it were yesterday. We met in a giant assembly room, where the teaching staff welcomed us and gave us complicated schedules, telling us which room to go to for each subject. Like everyone else, I was very nervous! As I settled into Science 9 class, I noticed so many faces that I had never seen before. Some of the faces that I particularly did not recognize belonged to four scary-looking characters sitting in the back row of the room.*

*The four, who became known to us as the B Gang, because each of their names began with a B, promptly made themselves known to a number of the boys in the class by routinely terrorizing them with verbal and physical abuse. Robert, who sat directly beside me, seemed completely oblivious to all of this. Each day I would reluctantly make my way to room 102 (I can still recall the room number) for Science 9 class. How my stomach used to churn at the thought of sitting in the same room with those*

*bullies!*

*The teacher was a very young-looking man, who wore nice clothing and seemed very polite but appeared hard of hearing (or afraid to recognize a problem because he didn't know what to do). The B Gang began from the first day to test not only the boys in the class but also the new teacher! It was mind boggling to hear them whisper bad things at him and then to actually hear bad things out loud when his back was turned. We could not believe that the teacher could not hear any of this. He even seemed oblivious to the names that the B Gang began to call some of the male students in class. When his back was turned, the B Gang even got out of their seats to push and threaten students. Somehow it all went unnoticed! Or chosingly unnoticed.*

*This went on until the fourth day of class, when a couple of the B Gang, who were now freely moving around the classroom whenever they chose, began to hassle a student next to Robert and me. Robert turned to me and said, "If they bother you or me, I will destroy each of them," and then he smiled pleasantly.*

*Despite the fact that there were four of them, I knew they were in over their heads against Robert. As fate would have it, the very moment Robert had finished the last word of his sentence, a member of the B Gang put his hand on Robert's arm. He was able to say, "Hey, Man!" but the rest of the bully's thoughts went unheard that*

*day. To say that Robert was on him in a flash is an understatement. By the time “in a flash” took place, two of the B Gang were on the floor not moving. The other two stared with a mixture of shock and fear before running out the door. Robert took care of the third one before we even had a chance to get to the hallway. The fourth was a better runner and made it as far as the school parking lot. He fared no better than the three before him.*

*Within five minutes, Robert had “destroyed” the B Gang as he said he would. Fortunately, the principal was an older and wise gentleman. He saw the carnage that Robert had perpetrated, and was I suspect shocked and amazed but, I also suspected, a little impressed. For here was a polite, friendly and respectful student who opened doors for girls when he had the chance and had never in his life, to my knowledge, even used foul language, yet what a street fighter he was! What a heart!*

*After interviewing each member of the class and the teacher, the wise and good principal chose not to punish Robert. Instead, he suspended the B Gang members and made it known to them that there might be other “Roberts” in the school who looked innocent yet could ‘mop the floor’ with them. The B Gang transferred to a different school by the end of the first semester. No one was particularly sorry to see them go, except the principal who—years later, when I went back to the school to thank him for all he had done--told me that he had wanted to*

*help them.*

*Robert went on to graduate from high school. As significantly, Robert never had another fight at school. He did not need to; no one in their right mind would ever try him.*

*After Robert graduated and gave up fighting people, he went on to become a fighter of a different sort--this time fighting fires. Last I heard, Robert was a highly respected fire fighter in the city of Toronto.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

Following the story, I have found it is useful to debrief. The storytelling pedagogy that I suggest never reduces a story to mere entertainment; its role is more important to engage the student. In this, I agree with Bell (2009) who maintains that, “Stories invite engagement in ways that a dry presentation of statistics does not. Stories also implicate us in a way that clarifies connections, that embodies the connection to what we are studying” (pp. 108-109).

In the class debriefing following the story, for example, I lead a directed discussion that addresses the following questions: Even though Robert was polite, kind, and respectful, could he still be *tough*? How was Robert loyal to me and to his brothers? Can you think of any modern day examples of people whom most of us would know that have some of the qualities that Robert possessed? What could

Robert have done differently, while *saving face*, to still help solve the problem with the bullies in the classroom? What would you have done? Why would you have chosen that course of action? If you were the teacher, how would you have handled the B Gang in your room?

To connect the story I shared with the class to the lesson--in this case S.E. Hinton's novel *The Outsiders*--I would ask the following questions: Whom do you think would be best able to tell the story of a bunch of tough teenagers? Is the story improved by having a teenager telling the story? Then I would provide a brief biographical sketch of the author, without mentioning her gender at this point, rather stressing her age (17) and her circumstance (a high school student). Following this question, I would provide a brief character sketch of the major characters in the *Greasers'* gang (the sympathetic protagonists of the novel), as a way to familiarize students with the main characters of the story. I would inquire, if a female were to tell Robert's story, what unique perspective might she give it? How might her telling of the story be different from that of a boy's narrative? Then, I would connect this question to a brief lecture about the author, Susan Eloise (S.E.) Hinton and identify some of the benefits of having the story told from that of an insightful young lady.

Lest the class misunderstand the point of the exercise and think that gangs and violence were things to be glorified and emulated, I would carefully discuss the ways

and means that Robert, in my story, was responding to a set of unusual circumstances and was acting in self defense. I would stress his positive qualities such as loyalty, kindness, courage, and respect—for himself and others; and an exciting story like Robert's may help to engage the student with the curriculum.

Robert's story may also create a strong affective reaction in students; at least it has in my classes for most of the past two decades. And like a beautiful piece of music or a certain fragrance in the air, stories may help students to engage with the curriculum. "A good story-teller plays our emotions, as a good violinist plays a violin" (Egan, 1989, p. 29). Stories as pedagogy may be more useful than simply seeking an emotive response from the student. They may be a link for a student to connect with the lesson. And told from a teacher's own life experience they present a dimension of positive modeling for the students. "Teachers need to be aware of their impact on them [students] socially, emotionally, intellectually, and physically" (Wilford, 2007, p. 2). One may reason that if a teacher shows genuine enthusiasm for the curriculum that may help to engage the student with the curriculum. I contend that a teacher's influence on the students is significant. St. Theresa of Lisieux (2001) notes, "As I was surrounded by nothing but good examples, I naturally wished to imitate them" (p. 8).

"To present knowledge cut off from human emotions is to reduce its affective

meaning. This affective meaning, also, seems especially important in providing access to knowledge and engaging us in knowledge” (Egan, 1989, p. 30). In Robert’s story, students may collectively cheer for the good guy and recognize the weakness in the bad guys. When I connect Robert’s story to the curriculum (*The Outsiders*), it becomes a transition to the novel, which deals with the major themes in both stories: friendship and loyalty. Students are able to experience vicariously a real “Tough guy” in Robert, yet like Ponyboy Curtis (the novel’s protagonist), they may recognize a genuinely decent and loyal person who does not want to fight, one who is “man enough” to appreciate sunsets and the beauty of life, and may find it more natural to engage with the curriculum.

It is apparent then that storytelling pedagogy may be one way to promote engagement in the classroom not only with the teacher and between the students themselves, but also with the curriculum. When used effectively the story has “immense power” (Copley, 2007, p. 296).

Teaching is a complex endeavour. Berry (2009) refers to it as “the messy and unpredictable nature of teaching itself...” (p. 306). Having taught for nearly two decades, I would agree. Though teachers go through careful pre-teaching preparation, there are still countless intangibles that influence the classroom. “Teachers are more than technicians who mechanistically move from one point to the next in a prescribed

manner. The lack of certainty in the classroom as students, teachers, content and context collide eludes a formulaic approach to teaching and the teaching process” (Hamilton et al., 2009, p. 206).

A sailor may have at his disposal a set of instruments, measurements, and other tools to help perform the task. There may still be uncertain waters brought about by the changing winds on the sea or other changes in the atmosphere. I believe that the sea, like a classroom, holds a beauty, but also a mystery that an experienced sailor is able to appreciate and adapt to, in order for him and his crew to experience a better journey. So it is for teachers. With 30 students, a teacher is faced with 30 different personalities and shifting moods of varying degrees; the teacher may face students who may simply be overtired, angry over parental abuse, exhausted from outside jobs, hungry from lack of good nutrition. Like the sailor, the teacher must use whatever resources he or she can muster in order to make the experience of the classroom better for himself or herself as well as those over whom he has command.

All kinds of real, pressing needs overwhelm the academic ones we so easily infer for schoolchildren. Homelessness, poverty, toothaches, faulty vision, violence, fear of rebuke or mockery, sick or missing parents, and feelings of worthlessness all get in the way of the learning deemed important by school people (Noddings, 2005, p. 151).

Little wonder, “Teaching and learning are themselves improvisational” (Rasberry, 2002, p. 109).

I am not prepared to suggest that teaching is exclusively an art, nor do I think that it is an exact science. I tend to believe that teachers have their training, theories, and tools of the trade to guide them; however, I believe that the imprecision of teaching as a science largely rests in the dynamic relationship with the students. This intangible leads me to favour the teacher as artist perspective. “Teachers as artists are sensitive to the tempo of the classroom, to matters of timing, and to the quality of their own performance” (Young, 2005, p. xix). One imprecision in teaching is illustrated through the unique circumstances that face one’s students, as in the following true story.

*Misjudging a Great Kid*

*I can still see his smiling and humble face. He was in the very first class that I ever taught. It was almost twenty years ago in an isolated part of Labrador. It was a bleak and barren place made tolerable only by the lively and decent young students that I had to work with. One of the brightest lights in that frozen place was a 16 year old named Blair. Blair was unfailingly polite as he walked into the class late each day. He was late without fail. Like clockwork, every morning in would stroll Blair, 10 minutes late. So at peace with himself and his universe was he that it was truly impossible to not like this kid, except for the fact that it was my class that he was coming late for each day. My class.*

*In my inexperience, I began to take his lateness personally. I talked with a few colleagues and they all agreed that he was a really great person, and yes, he was not the best judge of time, they all smilingly admitted. It struck me as crazy that this kid could come and go as he pleased. What was not known to me was that his mom had died about a year earlier and the staff knew that Blair's father was having a hard time of it, so they let Blair slide on the lateness. He was a good kid who always did his work, and "let the kid be" was the thinking.*

*When I heard Blair's story, I better understood that line of thinking. "We are here for the kids you know," my colleagues would say. I understood that on one level of course but on another, I thought, "But what message does that send to the kids that are responsible and make it here every day on time? It's not fair to them that these kids should get a pass for breaking the rules." So I stewed about for it for few more days and then resolved to talk to Blair about it himself, before playing my trump card by talking to his father about Blair's tardiness.*

*Ten minutes after class began, in walked Blair. It would be so good to talk with him now about this. Out to the hallway, we went. Behind my teacher smile, I was ready to chastise him, for I had truth on my side.*

*I began, "Listen, Blair. You're a nice guy and all that, but I getting tired of you coming to school late every day, every single day. What do you have to say for*

*yourself?” I asked him, as though there would be a defensible reply. He looked at me for the longest time, to the point of making me feel uncomfortable.*

*“Mr. Lannan,” he said, “as you may know, my mother died last year.”*

*“I heard about that and I am sorry,” I responded.*

*“Well, Dad has always liked drinking, and since mom’s death, that’s pretty much all he does these days. It’s not so bad for me, I mean, I’m in grade 11, but I have two younger brothers in elementary school and someone needs to feed them, clean their clothes, and help ’em with their school work. Well, I guess that’s my job these days. I also took a job after school to help out at home, so it’s been pretty busy. Well, why I’m always late is after getting my brothers ready for school, I take them. The problem is that it’s so cold I don’t want them waiting outside before school. I suppose I’m kind of scared of them getting sick or something bad happening, so I bring them in right before the their school begins, and then I run over here. Usually it takes me about ten minutes to make it from there to here. That’s why I’m always late. And I’m real sorry about that Mr. Lannan. I mean no disrespect to you or to the class.”*

*After listening to this young man tell me what he was prepared to do for his family, I had only compassion and respect for the boy, and a deep sense of remorse for being so rigid. Oh, and I felt love, a boundless love, the kind one might feel when one*

*sees a frightened performer putting fear aside and turning in the performance of her life. One cannot help but be moved by these acts that remind us of the very best qualities of the human spirit. I realized at that moment, that no one was ever going to give Blair a hard time in that school again. If he came in ten minutes late every day, well then so be it. I recognized that his dedication to the safety of his family was more important than my fragile ego.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

My interaction with Blair helped me to recognize that teaching was more complex than I had imagined. If Blair had not been so forthright and confident in himself and in his place in the classroom, I am not sure that we would have been able to have such an open and trusting conversation. I learned that to interact with students might make me more aware of the complexities of their lives.

Exchanges between students and teacher or among students are complicated by the multiple activity systems we all live within: One and the same action may be oriented toward a peer culture, where it may lead to gaining social capital, whereas oriented toward the school culture and teacher, it may lead to the loss of capital (Roth et al., 2004). All interactions and those involving teachers and students particularly are laced with ethical questions that traditionally go ignored because of lack of time and contexts for their discussion. In other words going to school is not just about learning, but also about producing and reproducing the social capital ([Bourdieu, 1987] and [Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979]) that has currency in student culture. (Stith and Wolff, 2010, p. 363)

It may also be noted that, valuable as storytelling may be in establishing a positive climate in the classroom, the use of storytelling that promotes student engagement can be complex. Berry (2009) points out that despite all of the teacher's best intentions and planning, one can neither fully control the pedagogical relationship nor the story's precise meaning as intended for students (Berry, p. 306). There are several factors that may explain the complexity of using storytelling pedagogy in a high school classroom. One of the greatest limitations for teachers to utilize storytelling pedagogy rests in the inherent problems of our current educational system. Shank (2006) believes that the inherent structures for maintaining community in American high schools is not currently in place (Shank, p. 147). I believe that the present challenges to community building in high schools may add weight to the importance of my work with storytelling pedagogy. "School curriculum has been dehumanized and centralized to include prescribed topics and standardized testing. As a result, teaching emphasizes the pragmatic and is mainly concerned with reportage, logic, analysis, and linearity" (Abbey, 2004, p.1). Because of this, "the heart and soul has been taken out of education... we are taught to believe that our humanness and our emotions will interfere with scientific objectivity and professional judgment" (Abbey, 2004, p. 1). One of the reasons for this is that 'We live in what has been called the age of alienation...' (Miller, 1992 cited in Abbey, 2004, p. 1),

which has led to ‘a profound sense of isolation from our human wholeness’ (Miller, 1992 cited in Abbey, 2004, p. 1).

Glazer (1999) picks up on the discussion with his indictment of an education system that ‘breaks down our experience of an experience of an alive whole into an endless array of categories, taxonomies, concepts, criteria and evaluative judgments’ (cited in Decker, 2007, p. 4). Barone (2007) reinforces the indictment against the existing priorities and philosophy of the current education system by referring to the American educational legislation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. “The law calls explicitly and exclusively for the use of *scientifically based research* (a phrase used 111 times within it) as the foundation for many educational programs and for classroom instruction” (Barone, 2007, p. 455). This in itself is not a problem, but the controlling and limiting way in which this law is applied, is taking away too much of the humanity which is important to real learning.

Perhaps part of the complexity of using storytelling pedagogy may also be attributed to a teacher’s inhibition to incorporate storytelling pedagogy into his or her practice, which may have trickled down from the academy itself. “...There is, perhaps, unease that storytelling is little more than ‘folk pedagogy’ (Bruner, 1986) in which ‘lay theories’ of education are presented as legitimate forms of professional knowledge” (cited in Savvidou, 2010, p. 661). Blakesley (2010) lends support to this

discussion by suggesting that scientific rationality remains suspicious, even hostile, to the use of stories within the scope of professional training (Blakesley, p. 8).

I contend that this is unfair. “To neglect the significance of storytelling not only devalues teacher experience, but also fails to recognize the influence of beliefs and assumptions that individuals bring to their teaching” (Savvidou, 2010, p. 661). No wonder an educator might be reluctant to share personal stories with students in such a prescriptive climate.

Teacher reluctance may also account for the challenges involved in using storytelling pedagogy in a high school classroom. This reluctance by educators is founded upon basic issues such as *What will others think of me if I do it? I might look silly; or I can't do that!* These all too familiar mantras reflect the fear that some teachers may have in undertaking a potentially risky venture like sharing a story, especially a personal story, with an audience of teenagers or even elementary schoolchildren. To be fair, this fear or apprehension has legitimate foundations. “Standing in front of a group of young people is a linguistic challenge” (Kohl, 2003, p. 101). It is not surprising that a primary concern that will be found among some educators is in their lack of confidence in simply being able to tell a story in a classroom full of teenagers.

I can relate to this as storytelling pedagogy has left me feeling uncertain at

times, like the teacher turned Pulitzer Prize winning author, Frank McCourt (2005) who talks about his own inner struggle in sharing stories with his high school students. “I am teaching. Storytelling is teaching. Storytelling is a waste of time...You’re a fraud. You’re cheating our children. They don’t seem to think so” (Mccourt, 2005, p. 26). And perhaps, too, this notion of uncertainty in using storytelling pedagogy in the classroom may help to account for the complex reactions teachers experience when using storytelling pedagogy with high school students. It may also help to explain the fact that after nearly twenty years of teaching in a variety of diverse educational environments, I have not encountered one single teacher that utilized storytelling pedagogy in a formalized or methodical, or even intentional way with his or her classes.

At best, a few teachers acknowledged that they did share stories but did so in a kind of unplanned fashion, more to kill time than anything else. “Unfortunately, the telling of stories is an infrequent and seemingly off-task activity in a mathematics classroom” (Zazkis & Liljedahl, 2009, p. 3). This information is both surprising and disheartening when considered in light Zazkis & Liljedahl’s (2009) observation that there is much anecdotal data that suggests the usefulness for incorporating stories as a means of creating lasting and meaningful images in the students’ mind (Zazkis & Liljedahl p. ix).

The apprehension with regard to using storytelling pedagogy in the classroom is increased by what Mello (2001) regards as the growing professionalization of storytellers who “have created the impression that telling [stories] requires highly specialized skills” (p. 4). This is far from the case, as Mello (2001) again, reminds us, calling storytelling a “native [to humans] and natural process” (p. 4). From a somewhat different perspective on the same issue, Baldock (2006) claims that “...the skills required [to tell a story effectively] can be identified and can be developed by practitioners whatever their natural talent” (p. 74). It is the “recognition of the importance of this task... [that] counts” (Baldock, 2006, p. 74). Utilizing a natural and native process, like storytelling pedagogy, in one’s teaching practice to promote student engagement, particularly when “teaching is full of emotion” (Emmer & Stough, 2001) and that teaching is a “performative act” (hooks, 1994, p. 11), suggests to me that storytelling may be one specific pedagogy to promote student engagement that a teacher could consider employing. Despite the fact that, “Stories are how we make sense of the world” (Daya & Lau, 2007, p. 2), storytelling pedagogy is complex. Stories may be powerful things and they may be interpreted in ways that one might not envision.

Thomas King maintains that “Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous” (King, 2003, p. 9). Like any form of communication in life, there is the

potential for a story to be misunderstood or misinterpreted by an audience. Similarly they may cause students to arrive at conclusions which the teacher might wish they had not. “Storytellers have the responsibility of respecting and protecting the audience as they travel together through the story” (Harris, 2007 p. 112). And it is the wise teacher that may recognize both the pedagogical value of stories in the classroom but also their potential for harm, particularly as the intended audience is comprised of teenagers. “Yet, people cannot truly predict what another person does with them [a story]. Stories compete for attention and are always out of control since they allow for multiple perspectives” (Smith, 2007, pp. 391-392). That stories are open to multiple interpretations need not be a discouraging influence at all. Abma (2003) suggests an interesting perspective when he posits the notion that stories may be beneficial and appropriate because they are fairly open to diverse interpretations, and may generate dialogue because of it (Abma, p. 223). The recognition that stories lend themselves to multiple interpretations may necessitate re-examining the story with the class.

Another possible reason for the complex nature of storytelling pedagogy may be attributed to the teacher’s potential feeling of the loss of control that may ensue following the sharing of a personal, humorous, or even self-deprecating story with one’s students. Part of the contributing problem of teachers’ surrendering a measure

of control in front of one's students is that it may be done in the face of a system designed to maintain a clear hierarchy between the teacher and the students. Pinar et al., 2004 assert that public schools are basically system-centered (Pinar et al., p. 258). It may be a system that promotes a student's sense of powerlessness and which emphasizes the teacher's responsibility to exert and maintain power. Yonezawa et al., (2009) point out that genuine educational change requires involvement from numerous persons within the school-community; and yet students are rarely considered for their voice (Yonezawa et al., p. 193). The teacher may be entering a unique and uncertain space by becoming vulnerable and open to the unknown or unexpected in the class' response.

Nonetheless, I believe that storytelling pedagogy may have a positive dimension, in terms of questioning the traditional power arrangement of a classroom. "Although teachers can never relinquish classroom power...the willingness to render oneself vulnerable can reorganize classroom power relations in ways that allow for more democratic, engaged, and productive practices" (Hill, 2009, p. 283). Allowing for a shift in the power relations in the classroom is clearly a venture into the unknown, particularly for the beginning teacher, and may well be conducted with an over-awareness and sensitivity to the potential consequences of this pursuit.

Like a cold rain during an August heat wave, how refreshing it is for a teacher

to stop, perhaps the typical drudgery of class, where the students have been sitting rigidly for the past forty five minutes, and say, “You know that reminds me of a summer vacation I once had when I was sixteen...” Students may be surprised or even feel uncomfortable, because it is different from the normal conduct of a classroom that seems to suggest that teaching is serious business and the *teacher as authority* must only speak of serious matters, as though levity and creativity were suspect in, say a math or science class. Students, in my experience, relish these moments, these flights of fancy, and listen relaxed and with pleasure as I recall a summer trip that illustrates how a teacher once thought about things as a sixteen year old himself. Too often, students simply cannot identify with the imposing authority figure before them. The shifting of power—a teacher stopping a lesson to allow for an anecdote or personal narrative, not unlike a set change during a play - allows students a glimpse of the diversity and humanity of their teacher. It is at once freeing for the students but also, I believe somewhat exhilarating for the students to be privy to an appropriate yet personal detail of their teacher’s life.

### **Chapter Three: The Interviews**

An Interview with Dr. Carolyn Mamchur, Professor of Education at Simon Fraser University.

J.L.: Jeffrey Lannan (doctoral candidate)

C.M.: Carolyn Mamchur

J.L.: Welcome Dr. Carolyn Mamchur, Professor of Education at Simon Fraser University. Having been a student with you this past summer, I was deeply struck by your effective teaching style. Specifically, I was rather surprised by your use, eh, your extensive use of storytelling as pedagogy in the classroom. Because my research is founded upon the idea of storytelling as one specific pedagogy to promote student engagement, my questions will focus upon the issue of storytelling as pedagogy in the classroom. So...question number one is how did the use of storytelling with your classes first come about?

C.M.: I guess I'm just a storyteller. I am a born storyteller, as I was raised by storytellers. My stepfather was a storyteller. When I was four years old, I was out in the woods around a fire and a whole bunch of union organizers, reciting poetry and all of these funny, old ballads; and so, I guess it's a natural thing. I really believe that people learn by stories. I think stories are a great teaching device. And it just came natural to me. It was never really a conscious decision. It was just what happened. So I started teaching high school when I was only nineteen. And whenever I want to explain something I usually illustrate with a story.

J.L.: Ok.

C.M.: I want people to know me as a human being, because I am asking them to present themselves, and I think it's only fair; so I'm always asking everybody....to share and narrative is a tool I use in so many ways, so it's not fair for me to ask you to tell a story if I don't share a story. I guess I don't think I ever consciously said, 'Oh, there's a great strategy; I'm going to do that.' I think I just did it naturally all my life.

J.L.: Right. I think that answers question number two quite well as well, [laughter] so that's lovely. My next question is, having taught at both the high school level and at post secondary institutions, and presuming you employed storytelling pedagogy in

both environments, could you identify any differences and similarities that you experienced—in terms of utilizing storytelling with both populations?

C.M.: I started teaching high school, and so, um, from there I had to be a little bit careful because I was so young.

J.L.: Um hum.

C.M.: My stories would have to be...more carefully regulated by the very nature of my youth, a lot, less risqué than the stories I tell now. But I always have used humour and always mocked myself a little bit; but not disparagingly, not in that way...but I can laugh at myself and be astonished at some of the crazy things I have done. So I have always told fairly personal stories but probably less...personal when I was young. When I got to the university level, I felt more that we were on equal footing. And I'd just tell any story that comes into my head, so I don't regulate; actually, I'm not careful at all...

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: ...so now I feel quite confident that it's not going to arouse anything, except laughter and, and a gentle, a gentle sense of our common humanity. That's what I always aim for-- that we're in this world together. We're just all together in this world and we're all just people doing our best with what we've got. And strange things happen to us, and funny things happen to us and sad things happen to us, and good things and bad things and that's what makes us...us.

J.L.: Um hum

C.M.: ...who we are. So I think the only difference would be that I would have been a bit more cautious. But on the other hand, I didn't have many stories to tell that were on the edge. I hadn't been on the edge yet.

J.L.: Right. Right, Yes.

C.M.: ...I'm a pretty high risk taker by nature.

J.L.: Because storytelling creates and, I believe, demands a measure of intimacy with one's audience, how do you determine when it is appropriate to tell a story with a

class of new students?

C.M.: It isn't appropriate and I do it anyway. Um, the first day of class, if I get a sense that there's a few people who may not benefit from my kind of teaching and may poison the class. I might be even extra-outrageous.

J.L.: Ah.

C.M.: And on, on purpose...

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...just to say 'Look! This is what I'm like and if this isn't what you want, you should beat it while you still can.'

J.L.: Um hum.

C.M.: You know, because I don't want to have to be on guard. I don't want to be careful; and I don't want anybody else to have to be careful or to be on guard. If we say something that makes us look foolish, big deal; so we look foolish for a moment.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: So if I sense judgmental kind of people on board, I really would prefer to steer them off.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...I think all teaching is extremely intimate. And I model that; I want to get down to that very quickly, and I don't know any better way than through storytelling. Now my comfort zone for that is high, as you know, I'm very comfortable. Other people might not be and I think you can only go as far as you feel comfort. The reason I get away with what I do is because I'm comfortable with it. If I weren't, or if I had an ulterior motive that was not positive; if I was trying to, you know, embarrass people or trying to control them or entice them or do anything that is untoward, it wouldn't work. You have to have a pure heart when you do these things.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: You have to really...want that sense of intimacy. You want things to be real in the classroom. I don't believe in objectivity. I think we're all together doing our very best, and we have different roles for sure. And my role is to try and create the opportunity for you to learn and then to give you any knowledge I can to help you to learn in a way that's meaningful for you; so, to me, the roles that we need to play are very clear.

J.L.: Yes. What are some signs or indications that a student has not been engaged by the story you have shared?

C.M.: ...Lots of signs-- crossing their arms, looking down, not making eye contact.

J.L.: Um.

C.M.: ...not laughing when it's hilariously funny.

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: When I'm telling the cow story, everybody's falling out of their seats...

J.L.: (laughing) Yes.

C.M.: ...even the one person who I thought would never laugh, the one who won't laugh.

J.L.: (laughing) Yes.

C.M.: She even looked up and said, "Oh, ok, I'm a giddy girl.

J.L.: Yes.

C.M.: You know; but if I get a repeated message...

J.L.: Yes.

C.M.: ...a frown, not laughing, crossing arms, not making eye contact, tight lips, and

then I know there's no connection.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...then, I'll go and talk to them and say, 'You know, I'm sorry you don't feel comfortable here. You're not joining in this, but this is the way the class is; it is very intimate and interactive and personal. And really, if you don't like that kind of class, please consider a different class--

J.L.: Yeah.

C.M.: ...while you can.' I don't say, 'Oh God. I'm never going to tell a story now...'

J.L.: Yes.

C.M.: ...or not let the class tell stories because this person, doesn't like it. I won't let that type of person bully me.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...I try to couch my stories according to my audience. I have a really good instinct...about that, and if I'm offending people, it's very rare.

J.L.: Um hum; um hum.

C.M.: You know, sometimes they're shocked a little bit, but they're usually entertained and they're certainly made to be at ease. My idea is to put them at ease.

J.L.: Right. Ok. I think that pretty much...elaborates well; it's a great response to my next question about contending emotionally with that defiant student.

C.M.: ...I do find that a defiant student will test you a lot, and I think I'm pretty transparent and I think that people know when that happens. So if they're, if they're fighting me and if they're, um, judging other people, and if they're not cooperating, or if they're withdrawing, and they're not putting in their real selves into it, I'm quite upset by that. So, I do take it very personally; and I also worry that they're not going to get anything out of this class, that that will really worry me.

J.L.: Um hum.

C.M.: ...And so I'll think about it and I'll talk about it over with Mickey; or I'll talk about it with Linda, and I'll say, 'You know, what could we do and how could that change' and all that kind of stuff.

J.L.: Right, right, so, ah, ah, collegiality enters into it with some closer colleagues perhaps, as well.

C.M.: Yep. I'll discuss it with other people who are in the class with me or are sharing it, or you know, like I would have talked about it with you, as a PhD student observing my teaching.

J.L.: Yes.

C.M.: ...Because often I have other professors or other students, PhD students observing me and taking part in what I do just to learn themselves how to do it...I am lucky.

J.L.: Uh huh.

C.M.: ...Also it's a good opportunity for them to learn...

J.L.: Ok, yes.

C.M.: ...They learn that that's not easy for me either. I don't think it's easy for anybody to feel that a student is turning off and not participating and not engaging and judging you.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: And unfortunately, usually what happens to me is I just get worse. I don't shut down, I get more outrageous.

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: If you think that's outrageous, listen to this. It's some kind of a rebellious little spirit in me that seems to happen unconsciously.

J.L.: Uh hum. Right.

C.M.: ...Usually Mickey's my, my best sounding board...

J.L.: Yes.

C.M.: ...She'll laugh, she'll say, 'Ok, somebody was making you mad; somebody, you felt somebody was judging you.'

J.L.: Wow.

C.M.: How did you know? 'Well,' she said, 'it was so outrageous.' And I will do that. And I ask, suddenly scared, 'Did I go too far?'

J.L.: Well ah...Yes... It, it seems to me that storytelling pedagogy creates alliances with certain groups of students. How would you advise a teacher to diffuse a power conflict in the classroom; that is, between those that, say, just adored your stories and those that were perhaps disengaged, or almost at times spitefully resistant?

C.M.: That's tough because there was, I think there was only one person that was really sort of, I don't know that she was so resistant to my stories, but she was resistant to the whole approach. And she felt sort of superior to everybody.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: And so, the only way I could get a person like that on board is to give them an opportunity to shine. So when she got up and presented, she felt really good about herself...

J.L.: Uh hum.

C.M.: ...because she was doing a good job.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: And then she was working in the group; they were doing a very good job of their poster presentation. And she was feeling really strong, good and was laughing, and was even clapping.

J.L.: Uh hum. Uh hum.

C.M.: So, I think the only way that I know how to do it is to give them opportunities to be successful.

J.L.: Ok. Um, do you ever plan ahead what stories you may share or disclose with a class to match a particular lesson or theme?

C.M.: Not really, if somebody asks me to tell a story “on demand” I probably couldn’t do it.

J.L.: [laughing].

C.M.: It’s actually whatever comes out of my mouth.

J.L.: Right. How does one determine what stories to share with one’s audience, considering the growing diversity of students at all levels in education these days?

C.M.: I think stories are amazing to all human beings and they’re universal. And so it doesn’t matter. A lot of people will say Asian students aren’t used to that kind of openness. My experience is that they love it!

J.L.: Uh hum.

C.M.: They just howl with laughter.

J.L.: [laughing].

C.M.: They’ve never heard a teacher talk like that before.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: They write to me in my emails: ‘You know we’ve never emailed my teacher.’ And they email me every day.

J.L.: Wow.

C.M.: And if I miss a day, ‘Oh we missed you so much!’ And they’re writing to me

as if I were their best friend in the whole wide world.

J.L.: Wow.

C.M.: And the boys start writing and they'll say, 'I can't believe these things I've never told anybody; I love this class.' That one little Chinese girl who was so quiet, the one that played the piano said, 'I've never talked in a class before.' So, I don't think there's anybody of any culture on planet earth that doesn't like storytellers. I mean, the great teachers have always been storytellers. Jesus was a storyteller.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: Parables, you know, the myths...stories are common...I don't think we should be so careful. I don't think we should worry about that. I think we should just say you're a person and I'm a person, and here's life; we're talking about life.

J.L.: Uh hum. Right. Should a new teacher, say at the high school level, in your opinion, even be encouraged to utilize storytelling pedagogy? And if so, how could that teacher develop his or her storytelling pedagogy with students?

C.M.: I think it's a hard thing to force.

J.L.: Um...

C.M.: ...It is a method that works for me. I think it's a method that might work for many people. It'll work for you if you have good stories to tell and you know how to tell them. It'll work for you if you feel comfortable with your humanity and comfortable with your commonality with other human beings; it'll, it'll work for you if, if you have an intuitive ability to sense when a story would make sense at that moment in time, or if needed just to change the atmosphere, or to move the energy along. I use stories for a million reasons: sometimes to make a point; sometimes just to break the ice; sometimes because I think somebody's back there sleeping and I'm going to wake them up.

J.L.: [laughing]. Right.

C.M.: ...or it'll remind me of something and I think, 'Oh God, I've got to tell them this; this is too funny.' And I'll just tell it because I'm having a conversation with

people in the classroom. I'm not up there lecturing.

J.L.: [laughing] Right. This is very reminiscent of the claim that Ted Aoki makes, that the teacher is the teaching. And because teachers are only human, do you tell stories in the classroom when you are in a bad mood? And if so, how does that affect the story itself or even the telling of the story? And is it even a good idea for a teacher to tell a story under this condition with a class?

C.M.: I'm rarely in a bad mood when I'm teaching. If I'm in a bad mood, I will just say, 'I am so angry' and I will say why.

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: I just say, Aghhh! I, I don't really tell a story; I just express how I'm feeling. I'm, I'm frustrated and this or this whatever; I just say how I'm feeling. I think if you are mad *at* the students, for sure don't tell a story, because it might secretly have the intention of hurting them, or secretly have the intention of trying to teach them a lesson in a duplicitous way by implying something. You know, and so, your stories can't have, um, they can't have... their agenda must be pure. You can't use a story to force people to be a certain way; you can't use a story to punish; you can't use a story to control.

J.L.: Um hum.

C.M.: The story has to come from a place of purity and joy and acceptance. So, if you're in a bad mood...I mean, I might tell them a story the time I almost killed myself since I was so depressed, and I think that's a story like that. 'Well I'm really bad today, but it's nothing like the day I walked out in front of traffic and I, I didn't, you know, have the nerve to kill myself. I just walked carelessly, and if God decided that a car was going to strike me, so be it, but I wasn't going to be careful.' And, so in my youth when I was really upset, I would become extremely careless with my safety...

J.L.: Oh.

C.M.: ...So I might, if I'm in a bad mood, say, if this happened when I was 14 years old I'd probably be walking down the highway with my eyes closed; but I'm not fourteen anymore, so I don't do that.

[laughter]

J.L.: Right. Following a humorous story, for example, how can an educator transition her or his class back to the lesson at hand, without compromising or negatively affecting the, the a dynamic of the class?

C.M.: ...You don't, you don't teach that 'Ok we're serious now and everybody's going to pay attention.'

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: Teaching is a joyful experience, and it's in the middle that I tell a funny story and everybody's killing themselves laughing. I'll say, 'Ok so now back to, what was I doing? What did I say?' And even if I remember sometimes I'll make them remember and bring me back. Or I'll call them back with my hand, 'Ok ok, come on back, you know, we gotta finish...There isn't a serious mode and a happy mode. You don't turn a switch; the stove's not on and off. It's, it's just being; it's a sense of being, and so I never would worry that I'm going lose control of the class because they're laughing at some stupid thing that I did...

J.L.: Ok.

C.M.: ...It would not occur to me that that would happen. I believe the opposite happens: that the more human you are, the more control of the class you have. You would not hurt a friend. You're not going to be awful to a friend.

J.L.: Ok.

C.M.: If people feel you care about them and they care about you, discipline issues usually disappear. I remember the boy who came in and he would never look at me. I wanted to grab his head, pull his head right up to my face, so I finally did and said "Hello."

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: ...I just like to deal with it in a real immediate way, not let him "disappear."

J.L.: Uh hum.

C.M.: He finally told me, 'I'm so sorry I don't look at you more' he said; 'I've just been so trained to not to. I'm so glad you try to make me and I am trying, but I'm not doing too well am I?'

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: He can talk about it... We acknowledge each other are real together.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...With some teachers he can just sulk in, and they might not care that he sulked in; never looked at them. I care. I want you to look at me. I want you to be part of me. I want to be part of you. I don't know what you're thinking. I don't know what you're feeling if I can never look into your face....So I want to see that little face of yours.

J.L.: Ok. Now following a self revealing story, for example, where the educator may discuss her or his foibles, I'm very interested in your opinion to know how the educator might guard against a student taking advantage of them in the form of inappropriate closeness or, or joking against the instructor? I think there can be a tendency with students to think, 'Oh we're all buddies' and lose sight of the teacher-student relationship at times. Can, can you talk about that?

C.M.: ...For a young teacher that is very possible. I think with older, more experienced teachers it's not very likely to happen. Ah, I don't worry about it, because if I sense it happening I'll just nip it in the bud. There are a million ways to do that. But I feel when you're really young if you made yourself look vulnerable and they haven't respected you yet. Then you can have some trouble. But you see, my students respect me almost immediately because of my position, my age, my credentials...Now when you're starting out you don't have that privilege, so you really have to be more careful. But as you work together they will come to respect you, and they will respect you when you deliver the goods; they'll respect you when you can teach them; they'll respect you when care about them. If you say you're going to do something and you follow through, you're a responsible person. If you say, for example, 'You can write about whatever you want to and that'll be fine.' And you stick to that, they know you made a deal and you keep it.

J.L.: Uh hum.

C.M.: ...These guys are giving themselves 24 out of 25.

J.L.: Right. Thank you. How do you sense or know how many stories to share with a particular class? That is, how do you know when still another story would complement the lesson versus one that, say, wouldn't and might just be for sort of entertainment purpose?

C.M.: You can sense it, usually. And you don't get all your work done.

J.L.: Are all stories told in the classroom pedagogical? Or when does the line form between one used to enhance a lesson and one simply to entertain one's class? And if it is for the latter outcome, is there anything the matter with that?

C.M.: ...sometimes I go overboard, and sometimes I spend too much time telling stories or I've gotten carried away with myself and just had too much fun.

J.L.: [laughing] Yes.

C.M.: God, where did the time go? I guess I told seven stories too many.  
[laughter]

C.M.: But it isn't I would ever I think...the questions you're asking me suggest that there is a formula that's a mechanical thing, like do you sit down at home and you say 'Ok, I'm going to teach this and here's the story that I'd use to teach it with.' With the way that I work that *isn't* what happens...

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...stories just instinctively come, and so I don't plan it; and I don't think 'Oh I've over told or under told' or any of those things; I don't think of it like that.

J.L.: Right. Ok.

C.M.: ...How would somebody know? I guess with my students they'd tell me.

[laughter]

C.M.: My students would just say 'Ok, enough about the life story.' There wouldn't

be a doubt about it.

J.L.: Do you consider gender to be a consideration in using storytelling pedagogy? I've taught in environments where I am deeply aware of the different behavioral responses that some students had when faced with me as a male teacher versus a female teacher. And it seemed to me that the female teachers had to earn their respect, more so from the students. Ah, and then so that being the case, do you believe that there are more challenges as a female educator using storytelling pedagogy?

C.M.: No I don't. I think they're different challenges. A male has to be very careful, nothing remotely sexual. Most of the time women can be more personal...whereas a young guy telling some stories might look like he's trying to get intimate with students by telling these personal stories; so I think you do have to be sensitive. If I were teaching in Abbotsford, and it's a very religious place, there's a lot of my stories I couldn't tell; you know, I couldn't tell them, because they would offend...I would never teach in a place like Abbotsford, because it would silence me. If I feel that I would be judged or that I would have to be silenced because of a belief that I didn't hold, 'Yes, you know, you have to be really careful, stories are dangerous' you know, 'being intimate is dangerous blah blah blah,' I wouldn't want to go there. The only thing, I guess, is that...if you needed the money or something, and I would find that my ability to be effective would really be curtailed. If I have to watch, if I think that the word police are out, then my ability to be real and relaxed and open and vulnerable and take risks is really, really curtailed. I want to create; I want a work in an environment where the values of the people are pretty consistent with mine...where it's important to care; important to joke; important to take risks; and that life is positive and joyful thing and not a negative thing. So I chose Simon Fraser.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: I'll go to work where I believe the values are similar to my own. And if it's not similar, I'll leave. I just don't want to be there.

J.L.: Right. Thank you. My final question is, as an athlete is intimately aware of her / his body's relationship during their competition and after, I think that a teacher's bodily relationship is an intimate part of her teaching, and so I wonder how one's body becomes part of the story's performance when one shares a story.

C.M.: Well, I think for me, because you know, my knee doesn't work and I've gained

fifty pounds, and I, sometimes I have to wear old shoes because my Achilles' tendon are hurting, I might bring that into the story. Like I might say things like 'before the ruination, when I was really young and beautiful.' And everyone laughs.

J.L.: [laughing]

C.M.: ...Or maybe I'll come to class and I'll have one hand nail polished and not the other. I might look down at that and I might say, 'Oh God, I remember, you know, when I was young if I didn't have perfect nails, I would spend hours and hours filing them. And now look at me: what's wrong with me? I come in and one hand is red and one hand's not even done...

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: I will bring notice to, to it because that again is part of who I am. Right here and right now in this moment, I'm a person who ...doesn't pay a lot of attention to physical appearance. Yet I'll tell a story of when I was a young teacher and very careful to always have my hair perfect, and my nails perfect because I was teaching a group life skills, and I wanted them to do their nails and wash their hair. So it depends on the situation. Those kids in our class couldn't care less what I looked like. It is on the bottom of their concern list and well it should be; they shouldn't care what I look like.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: To get back to your question, I don't think a storyteller is as aware of their body like an athlete type. I think what you are aware of is what's inside your body; it's your spiritual consciousness that you're sensitive to...and that you're trying to put out there...You're trying to say be gentle with yourself, love yourself, love life; know that you will make mistakes; know that it's important to try. What archetypal story are you living now? You might have been living a lover at one time and now you're living a sage, and that will make you pay attention to different things. Know what you value. Live by your own constitution. Don't let anybody tell you how it should be. Those are the things that I think about, not, *Do I look perfect? Am I leaning forward?* All of those things are fake. I'm not acting; I'm not on television. I'm teaching, so I'm just there moving about the room. I would never teach somebody storytelling by saying "stand this way"...It's about, it's about having the courage to feel, having that generous heart. Knowing that people learn when they feel it's

relevant and honest. Don't ask them to do things that you yourself wouldn't do. So If I'm teaching math, I'd probably tell fewer stories than when I'm teaching narrative...

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...When teaching narrative those stories become very important.

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: Just to make people feel a part of the group...And also to learn. I do believe people learn by stories...

J.L.: Right.

C.M.: ...They're, they're real things that they remember. People will come up to me twenty years later and they'll remember some story I told them and the effect it had on them. They're real; they not made up; they're not controlled, not formalized.

J.L.: Right. Evocative of what Thomas King writes when he says that 'the truth about stories is that's all we are.' Right. Well, Dr. Carolyn Mamchur, thank you very much for your time and insights. I appreciate it.

## **Interview #2**

An Interview with Dr. Yaroslav Senyshyn, Professor of Music and Philosophy in the faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University.

J.L.: Jeffrey Lannan (doctoral candidate)

Y.S.: Yaroslav Senyshyn

J.L.: My first question is how did the use of storytelling with your own classes first come about?

Y.S.: I suspect the answer to that Jeff is it was a spontaneous thing that I do, intuitively. From the very beginning, my tendency was to always teach through story, through narrative. I always felt that I could get my points across in the best way.

J.L.: O.k. And for how long have you been practicing storytelling as part of your

teaching practice?

Y.S.: Well, in that case, I don't mind telling you probably since around 1976.

J.L.: And how would you say this technique of storytelling or style of storytelling has evolved, or has it?

Y.S.: Ah that's a very good question. I think it does it evolve, but it evolves in the sense that it's not the direct story that evolves. The story evolves directly and indirectly, in terms of the conceptualization that takes place; so if I want to conceptualize a certain idea and the more complex that idea may be, the more the evolution or the evolving of the story or the narrative takes place. I see it a direct and an indirect connection. Now when I say indirect, I don't mean that that is of less importance; I use indirect in the sense of Kierkegaardian communication, which means, indirect communication is subjective communication.

J.L.: I see. And because storytelling creates, and I believe demands a measure of intimacy with one's audience, how do you determine when it is appropriate to tell a story with a new class of students?

Y.S.: That is an excellent question, Jeff. That does take experience. One can tell the right story to the wrong crowd; or the wrong story, in a sense, I suppose to the right crowd. I mean, it is, you know, right in the sense that they want to learn that way. I think this is something that a teacher has to develop, in terms of his or her timing; it's an intuitive informed intuition. Is this a class receptive to stories? And although one would like to think that all classes are, some aren't. Some, some feel that telling a story is too much something that reminds them of being too young that they're beyond that. So, I haven't run into this kind of prejudice; "Oh don't tell us a story, that's what mom and dad used to do." And that happens, which happens rarely, but it does happen; then one has to back up as it were and try something else, but still come back to the story. The big trick is to tell a story to this kind of class without them knowing it's a story.

J.L.: Ah, I like that. What are some indicators that would be suggestive to you that the class has disengaged and perhaps doesn't want a story at this point? Are there some things to look for?

Y.S.: Ah, this is very difficult to define. These kinds of things are not discipline. It

has to do with a dynamic of complexity that exists in the classroom vis-a-vis the bond. You know, and the nature of that bond between the teacher and the students. I am fortunate, as I think most teachers are; may I say most successful teachers are. There's no sense in being falsely modest. But if one is a successful teacher then one usually has a bond, a conduit of communication. And most of the time it does happen; but sometimes, yes, there are situations where something goes wrong. It can often be one student, and they develop a kind of antagonism for the teacher. It can happen. And then the teacher has to spend a lot of his or her time trying to figure out "What is the problem?" "Why this negativity?" "What am I doing wrong?" "Or what am I doing right?" So this can be very difficult but this happens sometimes because of the nature of the human being.

J.L.: It seems to me that storytelling pedagogy creates alliances with certain groups of students. How would you advise a teacher to diffuse, say, a power conflict in the classroom, between those that just adored your stories and those that were maybe less attracted to that methodology?

Y.S.: Very, very difficult situation because it's not just related to the story; when you have a dichotomous situation like that, chances are whatever you do it will be a dichotomous reaction, not necessarily the same but a dichotomous one. And when that happens, I think it's like anything else in the real world...No, what you do is find allies in the classroom. You build alliances. Now you don't do that in a sinister way, in a Machiavellian way. Well what happens is, is if you tell a good story, meaning if you teach a lesson well, vis-a- vie a narrative, and it's worked well and the big trick is to continue the story even though it may have ended, a good story never really ends.

J.L.: Uh hum.

Y.S.: The ending of one story begins another story. That's right; so one has to find practical strategies by which you reach these techniques. One of the best techniques for doing this is to leave something floating in the air, as long as they're listening, and presumably they are. You don't end it; you just leave it, so they want to hear it again and there's a consensus, meaning there's a desire. I once told a story on purpose where I wanted to get students involved in an opera. I was terrified of using the word opera, so I told them a story, which for all practical purposes was really a nineteenth century story. It was a story that could be related to our own time. It was a story that had love, passion, murder, all the ingredients that ought to be of interest anyway.

J.L.: laughing

Y.S.: And if you tell a story correctly and if you're not afraid to delve into that story at all levels that reflect the class, you know so even the tough kids are caught up because you're talking about the Mafia and stuff and how this husband wants to murder his lover...that kind of thing.

J.L.: Right.

Y.S.: And then you leave it and suspend it, so someone says, "Well how does it end?" "You really want to know how it ends?" "Ya." "Maybe tomorrow." [laughter]. "Don't miss tomorrow if you want to know how it ends." [laughter].

J.L.: Well I think you partially answered my next question; I was going to ask you if you ever planned ahead stories that you might share and disclose with a class to match a particular lesson or theme?

Y.S.: Yes, yes, very good question. These are all very good questions, Jeff. Um, yes and no, because I have two philosophies here. One philosophy is don't structure a lesson too carefully; always leave loose ends, because no matter how well you try to predetermine the event something's going to happen whereby you would have to change all your plans; and you must be prepared to do that to teach well. If you don't, you're going to say, "Oh no I'm going to stick with this plan...So I think there are two strategies here. In some instances, "Yes, I have a plan today..." On the other hand, if something were to happen in the classroom and I had a story planned at the time that no longer applied; then I could usually think of another one, you know more or less spontaneously...

J.L.: I wonder how, I guess I would say, I think that would be extremely useful in light of the growing diversity of students in the classrooms of today as well.

Y.S.: Diversity. Good thing though it is--and it is a good thing obviously—but it has a potential to be not such a good thing if the diversities are so extreme; for example, the diversity that takes place in various cultures. We love all cultures, but the viewpoints can collide with others. It used to be people would say, "Oh common sense is a universal thing, since the days of Wittgenstein." [laughs]. That's no longer true. Even common sense is constructed culturally. So if I was in Morocco, for example, in, I'm trying to remember now, 1977 or somewhere around there, and I had

to go to the washroom; and I remember asking where the washroom was...and I walked to the first one and I realized, "Oh my God, there's no doors on it. People were going to the washroom with no doors!" Now, for me, as a person from Canada, I did not like the idea of going to the washroom without the privacy. Later on I learned that, at that particular time, in the history of that wonderful country, with a great history, that people had a budget where they had to decide whether to spend more money on supplies for washrooms or peoples' education. You know, their common sense told them that the peoples' educational needs were more important than the private ones. And it all makes good common sense, but it didn't to me. So that insight is a very important one. So yes, one has to be very sensitive in a constructional story manner. One has to pitch it in such a manner that it becomes a shared experience. And if it isn't a shared experience, then one has to have the right environment in the classroom, so the students are not afraid to say, "Well maybe that's what X got out of it, but from our perspective, that's what we see in it." And that's good; that's learning...

J.L.: Should a new teacher be encouraged to utilize storytelling pedagogy? And if so, how can a teacher develop his / her storytelling pedagogy with students?

Y.S.: Well, I think yes. I think it is a great strategy, a great tool, especially for the young teachers. It's very difficult to teach kids. Um, yes, the easiest teaching probably takes place in the university. Simply because, generally speaking, you can expect them to be attuned to your presentation. They don't tend to, you know, get discipline problems, for example, like you may find in elementary school.

[laughter]

Y.S.: ...so keeping your kids' attention is very, very important. And a young teacher has the great disadvantage that the kids usually know: This is a young teacher, someone who has not much experience, so the job becomes ten times more difficult; so yes, I think that developing this technique early in a teaching career is very, very important. And the best way to that is to personalize it. You need to tell stories, I think, in terms of that teacher's personal experience, because that means that you're stripping, you're unclothing yourself. Yes, there's a vulnerability to it, but if you do it in, you know, in a sense of, what's the right word? If you do it sincerely, most students will accept that vulnerability. On the other hand, if that's too much for them, then there's nothing wrong with the narrative...

J.L.: Right.

Y.S.: And it depends on again, on the class and to what extent does this young teacher have on developing the situation...Presumably it's not as developed as someone who's been in the classroom for twenty or thirty years.

J.L.: I wonder how following a kind of self revealing story, because you mentioned, and I tend to agree with that very strongly, the personal nature of a story, in which the educator may discuss his or her human foibles in addition to what you've identified, I wonder how the instructor can guard against students taking advantage of them in the form of inappropriate closeness or inappropriate joking?

Y.S.: Sure. That's a very good question and a very difficult question, because indeed, a teacher's narrative style can be abused. Is that what you mean?

J.L.: Yes, sir.

Y.S.: It can be abused. Absolutely. And so one has to be sensitive to that possibility. For example, students could jeer. "Ha ha ha. So you shared that with us. You shouldn't have you dummy."

[laughter]

Y.S.: And it is quite possible and it does happen; so you have to be sensitive to that, and you have to be prepared how to defend a story. Now I think a very useful technique that I have used over the years, much less so at the university, more so at the secondary school level, was if he did jeer or jeered at others who found themselves empathizing with the teacher's story is the kind of thing to make up a story with those people who are jeering you. I remember, I can give you a very, very, ah, a very dramatic example. Many years when I was teaching in Ontario in grade 11, in the old, oh what was it called? *Man in Society*. *Man in Society*. One of the units that I was, I thought would be very interesting was boxing. There's a lot to learn from boxing...and I use the great boxer who's had that tragic illness. What was his name? ...Muhammad Ali. So his life I found very interesting. So I used that. Another study that I did was date rape, because it was something that was buzzing around in the news a lot at the time and...and you know; so when I told a story about that, one of the male students in the classroom became very disrespectful and abused the story, to say, "Well, everybody knows, you know, that when girls say no they really mean

yes.” This kind of stuff.

J.L.: Uh hum.

Y.S.: It was horrible, horrible; it was quite horrific. I was trying to figure out to what extent did he really believe he was saying, or to what extent was he trying to a, offend the women, the girls in the classroom. I wasn't sure, but I decided to take no chances. I immediately decided that this was an extreme situation, extreme indeed and that he was hurting the rest of the class. I immediately made up a story with him in it, making sure that everybody knew he was in it, just to quiet him down first of all. And the story was he was taking a walk in the park and what happened to him when the whole situation was reversed. That's the only time in my teaching career that I had to be that dramatic; but it certainly solved the problem.

J.L.: Uh hum. To change gears...

Y.S.: I hope that answered your question.

J.L.: Oh it certainly did. Yes, thank you.

Y.S.: Ok, Jeff because the question is quite complicated and there may be other ways of going at it but that, as I say, that was an extreme situation. And later when that student, in fact, did change his attitude. The story was so powerful that it made him understand. He had to personify rather than externalize the problem, he had to take responsibility by internalizing the potentiality. And ya, it was very powerful, and I'm sure there was some resentment, but at the same time it changed his attitude and after that he never did that again in the classroom; which I suppose may be a good thing maybe not so good, but I couldn't think of anything at the time. I'm sharing this with you the way that Wittgenstein will share in his confessions. It's not a moment that I particularly speak about often, but it does answer your question.

J.L.: It certainly does.

Y.S.: Extreme end, you know.

J.L. Um, again now, to change gears a wee bit, following a humorous story, for example...

Y.S.: Oh yes [laughter].

J.L.: How might an educator transition his or her class back to the lesson at hand without compromising or negatively affecting a positive mood of the class?

Y.S.: Well that's very important. But in order to that the humour must be positive. We can't be negative or sarcastic.

J.L.: No, of course not. No.

Y.S.: I don't recommend that kind of humour. I think that betrays, perhaps the insecurity of the teacher. Certain teachers use humour as it were to prevent other problems. That can be good but not always good. Ah humour, to get back, I think the idea is, um, timing. Because I'm a musician, I think that helps.

J.L.: Yes.

Y.S.: So you have to time the humour. You have to choose the moment when humour is going to be most potent. And there has to be an understanding in the class that the teacher is not afraid; the teacher is not afraid to laugh with the students. But also that the teacher is serious and that a little laughter is a good thing in the classroom when the teacher indicates like a conductor—[inaudible] --and that takes skill, because just as an orchestra has to be trained to make that transition, the conductor must have prepared people.

J.L.: Would you say that all stories told in a classroom are pedagogical or when does the line form between one used to enhance a lesson and one simply to entertain one's class?

Y.S.: A very good question. They're all very good questions, Jeff. One has to be very, very careful with stories. There's nothing intrinsically wrong...but obviously stories that are not pedagogical can earn a teacher a negative reputation. I've heard students say, "Oh take a course with so and so; he's a great history teacher. All he does is tell stories." But what they mean by that is not pedagogical stories. He gets off topic and talks a lot about stories that are not related to history. And that's his defense mechanism for getting through the day, but not necessarily a useful one. But that does not preclude once in a while telling a story that is not pedagogical if that helps to melt the class, and if melting is required then I'd say do it, but be careful. It's

like giving a child too much dessert after dinner.

J.L.: Do you consider gender to be a consideration in using storytelling pedagogy? That is, as a teacher myself I'm deeply aware of the different behavioral responses that some students have had when faced with a female teacher versus a male one.

Y.S.: I think so. I think it's true. I think there is a perception of a female teacher, a woman teacher—these are different. And there are certain stories that students associate with the genders. So for example, they would allow a certain type of sports story to be told by a male more readily than they would by a female. And there are certain stories that men can say and get away with as it were; whereas a woman is disadvantaged by a gender issue. We have not yet evolved into a society where that shouldn't happen.

J.L.: Ted Aoki claims that the teacher is the teaching. And because teachers are only human, do you tell stories in the classroom when you are in a bad mood? And if so, how does that affect the story itself or even the telling of the story? And is it even a good idea for a teacher to tell a story under this condition?

Y.S.: Now that's a very interesting question. I would say that one should not tell a story when one is in a bad mood. In the same sense that you would not want a conductor conduct — [inaudible]—because it sends the wrong message and even though one can technically do it, it's not a good performance. And a story is a performance. It, it, it stands for the teacher's performing; and just as we perform, you know, in a certain manner to educate, we can't really do the job properly, because our intonation would be incorrect. And even if we have to fake it, students are remarkably good at telling the difference, especially if they've heard the teacher tell stories when he or she has been good. So they'll know. And so the story won't have the effect of not having been sincere. You know, they may not say it but it'll be like saying "You better try something else today, Sir." Better that teacher give desk work."

J.L.: I'm interested in your reference to the story as a performance, and I wonder how does one's body become a part of the story's performance when one shares?

Y.S.: Ah yes, yes. Well that's a very important question. The better the storyteller, the better the body usage, the better the body language, and the better the facial expressions. Ah, I think it's extremely important if you're telling a story well that you utilize, not just your voice not just your eyes but the expressions, body language

communications. We, we use our bodies and we communicate with our bodies so much that we can't even analyze that we do; but for those of us that do analyze it, I think we're more susceptible to the knowledge of the implication; so yes, the body language is very, very important getting the message across.

J.L.: Thomas King writes "that the truth about stories is that's all we are." It seems to me that most educators engage in informal storytelling pedagogy. How might one formalize their storytelling pedagogy, or is this even a good idea for educators to attempt en masse?

Y.S.: I think it's ok for educators to analyze their own stories for themselves, but I think there is a certain danger in looking for formulas. Um, I'm always intrigued by a good story. And sometimes I have to read a good story that isn't necessarily a good book, but the story is very, very effective. As just an example of it, I'm just finishing the second novel of the woman with the dragon tattoos on her.

J.L.: Oh yes, yes.

Y.S.: They made a movie of it. I read the first. I don't sleep very well sometimes at night and I...I'm awake anyhow...I'm intrigued by how well this story is told. The second one I'm talking about right now is about 800 pages, and I'm intrigued that one doesn't want to put it down. And I often thought that if I could tell stories that well the students don't want to leave my classroom. You know, they're listening and learning. The problem is that as I do my analysis as I go along, course I see certain things; for example, there's certain adjectives, you know, are not used as frequently, a lot of details are necessary. The problem is I could only analyze it to a certain degree. At the end of the day, if it's really done well, it defies a definitive analysis.

J.L.: Uh hum.

Y.S.: That's what it defies. You could...the whole is bigger than parts. We analyze the parts, but at the end of the day, it's a truly good story; it's not a great book but it's a good story...At the end of the day, a great story defies a definitive formula, and if you try to create a definitive process for it, I think it'll backfire; although as human beings and as scholars, that's what we have to do; we do it anyhow. But I don't think that it necessarily will guarantee the result; it'll be helpful, very helpful, but it won't guarantee the result. And if one starts acquiring a formula it becomes very much like added risk. You can read thirty of them; you can read two thousand.

J.L.: Right. Well, thank you very much.

Y.S.: Thank you very much. I enjoyed your questions very much.

### **Interview 3**

An Interview with Dr. Paul Matthew St. Pierre, Professor of English, University Teaching Fellow for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Simon Fraser University.

J.L.: Jeffrey Lannan (doctoral candidate)

PSP.: Paul Matthew St. Pierre (Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences)

J.L.: I'm talking with Paul Matthew St. Pierre, Professor of English, University Teaching Fellow for the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Simon Fraser University. Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today.

PSP.: You're welcome.

J.L.: Paul, how did the use of storytelling with your own classes first come about?

PSP.: Well, it came about in two ways. This came up at a department meeting, an English department meeting today. One of my colleagues observed in a discussion that most of us, he said, all of us were not trained educators, so we didn't have training in the Faculty of Education; but we probably learned how to teach by being influenced by a favourite professor in the undergraduate or graduate level. And I became particularly interested in teaching between the third and fourth year of my undergraduate studies. I was in the Honours program at UBC, and at that time I had additional courses to take to meet the Honours requirements. So going into my fourth year I thought I would take one course during the summer session to lighten my load in the final year. And I took a course with Professor John Hulcoop. It was English 340 and I don't remember the title, but it was the great tradition of the novel, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century British fiction. And these were all mammoth texts and in the first class, Professor Hulcoop told the students that he was going to give a reading quiz at the end of the week; we met daily and anyone who did not pass this quiz would be asked to leave the course. I don't remember how much pre-reading I did, but I must have done quite a bit. I passed the test and went on with the course, and it was the best English course I'd ever taken. The subject matter was most engaging. But it was the best

course because of this teacher. And what he would do, I can remember two things: On one occasion he started the class and he put a little mark on the blackboard in a corner, an upper corner of the blackboard. And I don't know what everyone else did, but I presume everybody looked at it. "What's that there for?" He made no reference to it, but he went through his lecture, and in those days it was essentially a two hour lecture. And at some point he would come back to that mark on the wall and it would have a substantial reference to what he was talking about. And I thought, "That's really interesting." The other thing he would do is, you know this was 1975, something like that, and Northrop Frye and his *Anatomy of Criticism* was the big thing at the time. And you know we'd be talking about *Middlemarch* or something. And he'd say, "I'm going to interpret this novel according to Northrop Frye's *mythos of romance* and he'd go on for the next forty-five minutes, and then he'd say, "You know it reminds me of an episode of *Mannix*."

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: a private eye show in the 70s. And the structure of that television scenario conformed to the *mythos* of Frigian criticism and of *Middlemarch* or whatever the novel was. And I thought, "This guy watches TV?"

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: You know, he's an artist; he's an intellect. And I'd never wanted to be a teacher, you know, I ...It's not that I *did not* want to be a teacher; I hadn't had that aspiration. But I thought, "This guy does it really well." I knew that he had been named a master teacher. And I thought, "This is why. He does these sorts of things." You know, he wasn't just somebody clowning around. He was very intellectual, and so I guess I just filed that and thought, "I'll do that." And when I started teaching, I thought, "Well I don't know what to do. You know, I know a little bit about literature. I'll do what he did, and I'm not sure how slavishly I imitated another human being; but in short order, I guess I developed my own style.

J.L.: Right. For how long have you incorporated storytelling into your practice; and I think you did answer that in the first question. And it seems to me pretty much from the start; which I guess begs the question, how might it have evolved in that time or has it evolved from when you first employed storytelling in the classroom to this point in time?

PSP.: Well, it certainly evolved. And I think, you know, I'm not sure if I'm ever honest with myself. I'll try to be honest with myself. I think that at the beginning... If you will resort to storytelling for two reasons. First, I'd be very nervous. And I deal with nervousness by talking too much; I'm one of those people. And I suppose it's easiest to talk too much about oneself. The second reason is I have a kind of theatrical fear of forgetting my lines. Because I don't have a script to follow, I'm afraid of running short. And so, I think at the beginning, I thought "That's one way of not running out of material." But as one becomes more confident in teaching and gains experience, one learns what works with a class or with your classes and, in a sense what I as a teacher feel comfortable doing. And from experience you know that nobody cares whether you're nervous, unless you're a basket case.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: And you're always over-prepared; you're never going to run short. That's an irrational fear. But you're telling stories anyway, and the audience seems to like it or benefit from it. Now, I think I'm still being honest with myself. If I were to comment on the difference between then and now, I would say now I tell stories to subvert the traditional lecture. And it's hard to explain and I won't explain in detail; but I really want students to think, "Why is he telling about this? Why is he telling us about mashed potatoes and gravy when we're reading *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*?" And I'd like to think that that link becomes clear, that I can make it clear to the class. But I'd even be satisfied if someone left that lecture thinking, "I don't know what in the world he meant when he said that, and I'm not sure I know why I do that. I don't have a kind of political agenda to subvert the English department.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: But I want to keep students guessing, and I want them to really question what is supposed to happen in an English class. And in part, I want students to attend my class and think it's unlike any English I've had before, and some rather strange things happened in the class, but I also learned a lot whatever the subject was.

J.L.: Having taught at both the high school level and post secondary institutions, and presuming you employed storytelling pedagogy in both environments, could you identify any differences and similarities that you experienced—in terms of utilizing storytelling with both populations?

PSP.: I don't think I have a good answer, a scholarly answer for this. As I mentioned to you before we started running the tape recorder, I have only one day of teaching experience. I was a substitute teacher at Marian High School in Burnaby. And, it was 1950s Day. The girls, it's an all-girls school, were allowed to come to school out of uniform and dress in 1950s costumes. But I don't remember it very well. But I think all the girls were being subversive that day, so that they had their hair in pony tails, and they were wearing hoop skirts, ankle socks, and saddle shoes and so on. And they were all chewing gum and pulling their gum.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: And they were totally ignoring me. They just talked, and I don't remember exactly what I did. I mean, I may have sat back and thought, "Well this is easy money." But I'm quite sure I must have made some attempt to teach the assigned subject matter or to do that acknowledging that this was a, not really a work day for the students. And I probably did that by telling stories. I don't know what stories I told, but I would imagine it would have something to do with the fact that I'm not actually a teacher and, you know I'm kind of a non-threatening person. Anyway, why would I even mention one day's experience? And I think what I do now as a teacher with over twenty years' experience at this university is not really that much different from what I did that day in high school and it was, it was a really frightening experience for me. It's an oversimplification to suggest that students are at university to enjoy themselves, to enjoy this stage in their lives. But I don't want to be an impediment to the kind of enjoyment, intellectual or otherwise that these students are gaining from university. I want to make them feel good about taking my course and beyond perhaps. To do that, I think one has to be somewhat indulgent of students and, you know things like, I mean this is not typical of what goes on in the class but, students who arrive late for the class; students who fall asleep in your class. And everyone is aware of, you know, it might be a small class, everyone is aware of Bob over there is nodding off.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: And I just go on, you know. I notice it as well and everyone sees that I know; but I don't care. They can all go to sleep if they want.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: Um, and I am kind of anticipating one of your later questions, but I think what I have to do is occupy these students at this hour, this two hour period. And I remember, I taught at UBC for about eight years and I taught English 100. A number of times I taught an article by Tom Wolfe titled, “What If He Is Right?” It’s an article about Marshall McLuhan. And, Wolfe quotes McLuhan, who taught at the University of Toronto in the English department at the time, at the height of his popularity as a writer, that teaching freshman English was a babysitting exercise. And because I was teaching freshman English at the time, I thought this would be amusing to emphasize this particular statement to the class. But it stuck with me, and I don’t see it literally like that, but in some ways I have a custodial, almost custodial-parental role with the students.

J.L.: How do you contend with the students that do not appear to have engaged with the story or stories that you may have shared in the classroom?

PSP.: Well, I contend with them in two ways. I remember, well it must be several years ago now when Ellen De Generes had a television show, not the talk show, but a situation comedy. And she was a member of a book club. And she found out that there was someone in the book club that disliked her; there was one person who disliked her. And she set about trying to find out who that person was to win them over. And she ended up alienating everyone in the book club; and at the end of thirty minutes everyone disliked Ellen.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: Anyway, I thought, “Well that’s me.” I always want to win over the dissatisfied person. But I look at it in two ways. The first is I have to win that person or those persons over. And sometimes I’ll do that in mid-course if I’m recounting an anecdote and someone rolls their eyes or something. I think well, “I have to be more engaged in my story; I have to tell the story faster or slower, in a louder voice, a softer voice. Whatever. Make the adjustment to win that person over.” The other way I look at it is accepting the inevitability that some people just aren’t going to like *you*, never mind your stories. And I hope I’m not just rationalizing an inadequacy in teaching. But I think if someone in your class doesn’t dislike your stories or your pedagogy or just you period, you’re probably not doing a good job. You’re probably not, I’m probably not doing something original or daring or unexpected. And, speaking pragmatically, sometimes people don’t like your storytelling because they’re not getting a good grade in the course. And they think *He’s the reason I’m not getting a good grade; he*

*should be teaching me deconstruction theory or something instead of mashed potatoes.* And there's not really anything I can do about that; so right until the last minute into the last class I will try to engage that alienated student. But I think that I also realize that there's not much that one can do. I had an experience with this in the last class I taught, where I had a student who was not satisfied with his grade. He wanted to know how to get a better grade; he wanted to rewrite a paper. And he wasn't a very good writer. When he rewrote, it still wasn't very good. To me, it looked to me as though he wasn't putting the work into it.

J.L.: Uh hum.

PSP.: And when I got my evaluations, and they're anonymous of course, but there was one evaluation that I was able to attribute to this person. And I thought, he concluded that I wasn't a good teacher. My conclusion is that he wasn't willing to acknowledge that he had to work harder to get better grades. That really hurts me, that evaluation. I want great evaluations from a hundred percent of students in the class. But it's really inevitable, I think, to answer your question, I don't really care about the student that is disengaged by the way I'm teaching.

J.L.: Right.

PSP.: As heartless as that sounds.

J.L.: What are some signs, and you did allude to this with the eye rolling, or indications that a student has not been engaged by the story you have shared? Perhaps in addition to what you identified?

PSP.: Well usually I see, I'm not sure how good I am about perceiving this aspect of the audience. Eye rolling is a rather extreme reaction. That kind of shocks me because I wonder, "Do they really think I don't notice them doing that?" "Or maybe they do know that I will notice that and they're trying to get at me." But, I look at more subtle indicators of the student's engagement with my teaching. And in the field that I'm studying right now, it's called biosemiotics, a PVFG Display (Postural, Vocal, Facial, and Gestural); and, to state the obvious, when I teach, I look round the room. I try to make eye contact with everyone in the class. And you can tell from facial expression whether someone is engaged or not. One of the things that I like to do is to shock people. So that look of shock is not necessarily one of disengagement, or at least it's not one I'm avoiding.

J.L.: Yes.

PSP.: But, the student who falls asleep is a sign of my failure. And there are other signs. I don't know whether if someone is slouching in a chair if their posture is not good; whether that indicates anything other than their poor posture. But, I think I'm more attentive to these kinds of displays, so in the field that I was talking about, these are means of sign transmission. These students are sending me messages in their gestures, their voices and so on. And I'm not sure how accurately I read them, but I'm always looking at that sort of thing and wondering at the very least.

J.L.: Yes. How do you, and I believe you did speak to this a few moments ago, I'll ask and if there's anything you can build upon: How do you contend emotionally with a defiant student that does not seem to appreciate any story that you have to share? So in terms of the emotional component, when you leave the classroom, do you leave the memory of that disengaged, defiant student behind?

PSP.: I don't leave it behind. No. I'll give you an example. As I mentioned to you somewhat earlier, I was at an English department meeting today. And we were discussing experimental learning. I made a comment; I made a contribution to the discussion. And I don't talk a lot at English department meetings and never have; but I had something to say here. I made my observation. In making it, I was conscious that I was, seemed to be going on rather long. I don't know where, but people seemed to be looking at me, listening to me. And I wound down my observation and the discussion went off in another direction. And in the remainder of the meeting, I was thinking, "What I said was inane." I believe I said that "This and that were distinctly dissimilar." I think that's redundant.

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: Oh my goodness, I'm an English teacher and I used a redundancy and everyone must have noticed. It wasn't a big deal and I wasn't conducting the meeting, but I thought, "That was a disaster." After the meeting I saw a colleague in the corridor, and said, "Hello, how are you?" And she complimented me on my observation. She referred to it as the story I told. And she remarked on how articulate I was. And I could tell by her facial display etc. that she was rather happy making this remark. And I thought, "What did she see?" I did not state anything that was comprehensible.

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: And I come out of my English classes the same way. I mean, I put my heart and soul into them, but I tend to think, “That was a disaster.” And intellectually, I know I achieved what I set out to do. I wasn’t incomprehensible, but I have this lingering feeling that people see through me. And even when I get my student evaluation forms at the end of the semester, and think, “Wow! It was a successful class.” I still have this feeling. Your reference to emotion, I wondered as you were posing the question, whether you mean the emotion of the student that’s disengaged or my emotion and I thought, “Well what I care about is my emotion. You know, when I leave a class, having made an emotional commitment in the lecture and feel that it was a failure, it’s very painful. It’s painful today and the last class and over the past twenty years. And I think, this is why I am a good teacher, because I’m able to endure pain to make the class successful.

J.L.: Right.

PSP.: Don’t go into class thinking people are going to compliment and stroke you, and you’ll feel good like a dog that’s been petted or groomed. You’re there to work. And work sometimes hurts. But the problem with working as a professor, as opposed to laborers, in my family of laborers, is that you’re doing intellectual and emotional work, and that feeling of being spent is sometimes rather painful. I sometimes wonder if it’s worth it.

J.L.: Uh hum. Like any kind of emotional commitment really, isn’t it?

PSP.: Yes, exactly.

J.L.: It seems to me that storytelling pedagogy creates alliances with certain groups of students. How would you advise a teacher to diffuse a power conflict in the classroom between those students that just adored your stories and those that were disengaged and almost spitefully resistant?

PSP.: If the power conflict involved me, if it was a conflict between two groups of students and the professor, I would probably refrain from telling stories. If it was fifty-fifty: if ten students were disengaged and ten students loved the stories, I would probably think, “I’m going to tone this down, because you know, I don’t want to lose half the class. Well, I’m not a student in my own classes, so I don’t know how that conflict would carry itself out. But I tend to think theoretically that a conflict of that sort would actually be good in a class, because, unless the students are just isolating

themselves in opposite sides of the classroom; if they're actually engaged in the discussion, like "This guy's an idiot; no he's not an idiot, he's actually..."

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: I think that would be good, because that discussion is going to pertain to pedagogy. "Don't you see what he's trying to do when he does that sort of thing, when he tells that story?" It really is related, is related to our subject matter. The other side might say, "Well, I don't think it is." But the point is they're at least discussing the fact that the professor has a methodology, and he might have a purpose; and they can evaluate my pedagogy and they are free not to like it, as well as to like it.

J.L.: Do you ever plan ahead stories that you might share and disclose with a class to match a particular theme or lesson with that class?

PSP.: Do I ever? I do. I plan ahead; for the most part I don't plan ahead. But when I do plan ahead, I do it for two reasons. First, I want to introduce a lecture in a sort of benign way. And at the beginning of a course I might read the class list, read the names off the class list and do things like that. I will tell a story or recount a series of anecdotes by way of introducing the lecture. These anecdotes might have specific reference to my topic that day or they might be just ice breakers. In other instances, I will prepare another kind of story. I'll give you one example. I tend to teach fiction, and I have a specialty, a critical specialty called narratology, which is simply the study of narrative. And one of the things I will tell students at the beginning of a course, in the first few weeks of a course is the word narrative and a lot of related words in the English language derive from the Latin word *gnarus*, which means knowing and one who knows. And what the word actually means is *one who knows knowing*. And I'll say something like, "How can someone presume to tell a story? They can make that presumption that they have the authority, if you will, to tell a story because they know something; they know something comprehensibly or intimately or they know something that no one else knows or no one else has thought about. You tell stories because you have a story to tell. And then I will recount a little story about my grandmother in Shropshire, England in 1912. And she was ten years of age. Her name was Eva, and she was walking down a little lane in Oakengates in the town with her brother, Will, two years older, and they were walking along and Eva says to Will, "Will, I've fund summut." She saw a penny in the road, and she tells him, "Will, I've found something." "Will, I've fund summut." And he looked at it and said, "Well, put thee bloody foot on it, Eve." You know, meaning, don't let anyone know that

we've spied this. And when no one is around we'll pick it up. And then I'll explain that having a story to tell is somewhat like that; it's like finding a treasure; and you have to protect it in a certain way and know when to disclose it.

J.L.: Yes.

PSP.: And I hope that that is an illustrative story. But I do it because I love my grandmother, and I miss her. She died thirty years ago, and I miss her like it was today. And I want to talk about my family. I don't have enough people who will listen to me talking about my family. But these people, my students, they have to listen.

J.L.: [laughter]

PSP.: But I also want them to know it meets an emotional need for me to tell these stories, because people did these things and the stories continue to exist long after the characters have died. And that idea of preserving something beyond a life is extremely important. But I also want my students to know that I'm not just, I'm not a generic professor. You know, they refer to me as *The Prof*. I'm a human being with a family, with a past, with a lineage; and I just think it's important for them to know that.

J.L.: How does one determine what stories to share with one's audience, considering the growing diversity of students at all levels in education these days?

PSP.: I'm not sure. I hope I'm very sensitive to matters of diversity in my classroom. But I'm not sure how well I can attend to cultural diversity in addition to a diversity of views or viewpoints in the classroom. And I tend to think naively that everyone will get something; whatever their background, everyone will get something from the story. But I think I'm also willing to be dismissed.

J.L.: Should a new teacher even be encouraged to utilize storytelling pedagogy? And if so, how can a teacher develop his or her storytelling pedagogy with students?

PSP.: Well, in answer to the first part of your question, I would say yes and no. The obvious affirmative answer is, if telling stories makes a teacher comfortable, if it allows her or him to engage with the students, then by all means they should pursue that. My negative answer has to do with my own experience; and although I may say

this now, storytelling works; my students comment in their evaluations, “He tells great stories.” And I think, “Well, go on then; keep doing it.” But that’s not how I began. Storytelling was a kind of survival mechanism, and I don’t mean simply because I was nervous and I thought I would run short. Teaching is a traumatic experience for me. It’s an experience of suffering and storytelling is a way for me to cope with that discomfort. Occasionally, and this quite rarely, students will comment, again in these forums, “He’s very good, but he’s quite nervous.” And I’ll think, “I thought I got over that.” But I almost welcome that remark, partly because it’s rare. But it’s as if someone seems to acknowledge what I feel when I am teaching. And I’m glad that someone has noticed. I want them to know that I put a lot into teaching. Anyway, to provide the negative answer to your question, if encouraging a new teacher to tell stories as part of their pedagogy means that they will have the experience that I have; then I would not do it. I would not want anyone to have my experience in the classroom. I remember I taught for two years as a sessional instructor, sessional lecturer, I guess it was at UBC. And we used to share offices. And in my second year, I had an office mate who was in the first year of his tenure; it was limited to two years. And in the spring, we were talking about the term coming to an end. Just in conversation he mentioned that he was not coming back next year. And I said, “Well why?” He said, “Well I don’t like teaching.” And I said, “Well don’t say that. When I taught in my first year it was quite difficult and frightening; but by the second year I felt really comfortable and I really enjoyed the second year. Just stick it out for another year and you’ll find that as well.” He said, “No, you don’t understand; I don’t like teaching and I’m not going to do it anymore.” I was just drawing an inference at the time, but this was not someone saying, “I don’t believe you; I’m so frightened I’m going to run away.” This was someone who had made a career decision. And I’ve thought about it; I don’t even know the person’s name, but I’ve thought about it since then. And I’ve asked myself, “Do you like teaching?” “Are you comfortable with teaching?” “Would you like to run away?” And in a way I’m proud that I’ve stuck it out, that I haven’t run away, and that I’ve been recognized for being competent. But at what cost? And for me the cost is worth it, because these are young people in formation and I want to do everything I can to inspire them.

J.L.: Following a humorous story, for example, how can an educator transition his / her class back to the lesson at hand without compromising or negatively affecting the positive mood of the class?

PSP.: Yes, well I think to state what is probably quite obvious: If the humorous story is thematically related to the lecture or that portion of the lecture, you simply resume,

you step out of the comedy and resume the serious lecture by changing the mood, by changing the tone of voice, your body language and so on. But sometimes, one digresses from a lecture and tells the humorous story, it could be simply a joke that has nothing whatsoever to do with the lecture; and I think the easiest way to get back to business is to acknowledge that one has digressed outrageously, and it's now time to get back to work. I'll give you one example of this. Last semester I taught a course on health culture and the diagnosis of disease, focusing on two writers, Janet Frame and Stephen Hawking, both of whom were diagnosed with different diseases. And one day, this story's going to go on in irretrievable directions.

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: I live on Lasqueti Island, which is a small northern Gulf Island, off the coast of Vancouver Island near Parksville. And I was on the passenger ferry coming back to Vancouver. And someone sitting behind me said, I was reading a book by Stephen Hawking and Roger Penrose titled, *The Nature of Space and Time*, and someone behind me on the passenger ferry said, "Are you learning much about Space and Time?" I turned around and it was a stranger and I answered the question. And mentioned that the book was about quantum mechanics and he said, "That's my greatest interest; I could talk endlessly about quantum mechanics." So we had a one hour conversation, for the duration of the voyage, about quantum mechanics. And this particular day, this man had on a knitted cap, the ones with the little braided strings down the side; he had about four days growth of beard and hardly any of his face was visible; he was all bundled up. And he looked to me like an old guy. The next time I was on the island, I was again coming home, and I was on the dock walking to the ferry. And I heard someone again behind say, "There's my new friend Paul." I turned around and I saw someone I didn't recognize, and it was this fellow, Mike. He was with his girlfriend, Tracey. And his girlfriend looked like a Kokanee girl from the Kokanee commercials. And Mike didn't look like an old person; he looked younger than I am. I said, "Pleased to meet you, Tracey." But I was thinking, "Wow! How did he score such a gorgeous babe?"

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: But he was cleaned up and he looked presentable. Anyway, I offered to help Mike, who was visiting Lasqueti just for the weekends, to build a cabin. Now, all I offered to do was to help him carry something, if he needed anyone. And I realized that he goes there on the weekend with Tracey, although not the first time I met him

on the ferry. And somehow it came out that I offered to help Mike on the weekends as a rival of Tracey. I was a rival for Mike's time, for Mike's affection. And Tracey had to be taken out of the picture. Anyway, I told my class this story in a number of segments over several lectures. Initially it was just, I was reading one of our prescribed texts, and I had a conversation about, of all things, quantum mechanics. And the next week it would be "I ran into Mike and Tracey again. And I think there's a rivalry that's set up." It's hard to replicate it now, but the story was getting out of hand. It was now becoming a gender struggle or romantic struggle. I think the class knew that I was really exaggerating at this point, but it's as if I'd created a couple of characters and the students were willing to hear the next installment of this on-going historical narrative. But I reached the point where I thought, "How do I get back from this to discussing Janet Frame and Stephen Hawking and quantum mechanics and health culture and so on?"

J.L.: Right.

PSP.: But it was a joyous moment; you know, everyone in the class was laughing because it had gone too far. I don't know, but the class simply realized that it's time to go back now to our serious study. And you just do that. But those moments, rather rare, those moments are really good for a class. It's good to forget working; you know, to have a break, to do something silly and then get back to scholarship.

J.L.: How do you sense or know how many stories to share with a particular class? That is, how do you gauge when still another story would compliment the lesson versus one that wouldn't?

PSP.: Sometimes I tell too many stories. I think I'm better at avoiding that now than I was maybe ten years ago. I tend to think now that, you know, when I mean stories I don't mean a "Mike and Tracey story." I mean something closer to an anecdote, like my grandmother walking down the country lane. And I probably recount maybe two of those stories in a two hour lecture. But I really fill my lecture with distinctive commentary, and I make some rather bizarre comments in class that have nothing to do with what we're doing. Sometimes they're self-deprecating comments; sometimes they're comments about academia. I mean, I'll give you one quick example. Students are always asking for extension on assignments; and I will mention that I'm editing this volume of articles and professors are notorious for missing deadlines. They're actually worse than students. And I think it might be reassuring for my class to know that. It's not important that they know that I'm doing a certain type of research; but I

think it's important to know, although I don't condone lax assignment writing, it's a human failing. And they shouldn't feel terribly guilty about missing deadlines maybe they're overwhelmed with work; undoubtedly they are.

J.L.: Right. Are all stories told in the classroom pedagogical? Or when does the line form between one used to enhance a lesson and one simply to entertain one's class? And if it is for the latter outcome, is there anything the matter with that?

PSP.: Well I think it's used, stories are used for both reasons: pedagogically and for purposes of whatever this means, entertainment. Is there anything wrong with it being the latter? I would say no. And I can tell you a story to illustrate this point. When I was in first year university, I took a fine arts course at UBC taught by Hal Kalman, and I absolutely loved this course. And I really admired the professor. He taught in a really inspiring manner, and I just really admired him as a scholar and a knowledgeable person. And one day I was hitch hiking home on North-West Marine Drive and a little red MGB pulled up. And it was my fine arts professor. And because it was a large class, I realized that he would probably not recognize me, so I identified myself. He asked me how I liked his course. I said that I really enjoyed it and so on. And I added, "I find you very entertaining." And he said, "Oh, I don't mean to be." I spent the rest of the ride explaining that by "entertaining" I meant intellectually stimulating, challenging and so on and so forth. But I've retained that story because I've wondered about entertaining, and I see myself as an actor in the class delivering a performance. And if someone said to me, "You're an excellent teacher." I would say, "That's because I'm an actor; I'm playing the part of an excellent teacher; I'm actually not a good teacher." But I think in that capacity, in a theatrical capacity, I am entertaining them in a pure sense by making myself interesting to listen to and to watch; but I'm also entertaining to them in that intellectual sense, I hope. But in answer to your question, unless one is neglecting one's responsibility as a teacher, I think one can be almost a pure entertainer, if that act prompts students to independent thinking.

J.L.: Do you consider gender to be a consideration in utilizing storytelling pedagogy? That is, as a teacher myself, I am deeply aware of the different behavioral response that some students have when faced with a female teacher versus a male teacher?

PSP.: I have two answers to that. I'll offer the first answer by acknowledging that most of my students are female. It's not just something I notice about the makeup of the class; it's something I'm aware of when I teach that I'm teaching to a certain type

of person. My other way of looking at this, and this is going to sound strange, even if you knew me this would sound strange. I don't see myself as gendered in the classroom. I'm self-conscious; I know that what I'm saying at this point in my lectures is kind of typical of a man, for the obvious reason that I am a man. But I tend to see myself as androgynous in the classroom. To me, you know, not that I have anything like his talent, but I'm androgynous like the Little Tramp, or Pee Wee Herman or, that's the kind of character I would like to be. I want to be loved like that, like that character; to be funny like that character. And naively, I tend to think maybe all men think this way. But I tend to think the majority of my class, the female component thinks, for a man, I'm ok. I'm just rationalizing patriarchy there.

J.L.: [laughter]. Ted Aoki claims that the teacher is the teaching. And because teachers are only human, do you still tell stories in the classroom when you are in a bad mood? If so, how does that affect the story itself or the telling of the story? And is it even a good idea to tell a story under this kind of condition?

PSP.: I don't think I'm ever, and this is an incredible comment, but I don't think I'm ever in a bad mood in class. I love teaching and I'm generally happy when I'm teaching. And maybe in the theatrical sense, I have to put on a good show; I can't let the audience down; I can't let my own feelings interfere with my portrayal of a character, if you will. I also think that, I can't remember the quotation, that the teacher is the teaching, I tend to think in the theoretical sense. Let's say I'm teaching health culture and medical diagnosis in the writings of these two figures. I think that what students learn from taking my course is how I teach that course. Now they might learn that Janet Frame was born in 1924 and she was diagnosed with schizophrenia, but it was a false diagnosis and so forth. But they're really learning about my attitude towards Janet Frame, my attitude toward teaching. And I'm reminded of the French Dada artist Marcel Duchamp who died in 1968, but in, probably 1968, he was told that an Italian writer named Arturo Schwarz was writing a book about Duchamp titled, *The Complete Works of Marcel Duchamp*. And he was asked, "How do you feel about that? Meaning, are you threatened that someone is writing the complete works when you're still producing works. And he said, "I don't find that threatening at all, because I don't think that book will be about me; that book will be about Arturo Schwarz." It's a dangerous idea that I'm teaching English 364 on literary critical history tomorrow. It's the first class. I'm not going to tell the students that they're not going to learn anything about critical history; they're only going to learn about me and how I teach it. But in a theoretical sense that's what happens. And I hope that's interesting for students.

J.L.: How does your body become part of the story's performance when you share a story?

PSP.: Well, I think it's all about the body. It's almost like, it's like offering the class your body. I tend to think, this is a really whimsical idea, but I tend to think, "I don't really do very much to teach a class. I just go to the front of a room and stand there. People stare at me, and they do that for four hours a week for thirteen weeks. All I have to do is be there, and they want to love me; they want to like me and the course. And they're willing to overlook the fact that I'm not actually doing anything very remarkable; I'm just standing there."

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: I don't know whether any student would ever look at the learning experience in such a narrow way; but I think that in that sense, I offer my body to the students. And I think, to go back to what I said earlier, if I'm in a sort of pain, maybe as an actor, I want to conceal my pain. But maybe as a person, because I'm not an actor playing a part in a class; I'm a person doing a job, I want people to recognize that I am uncomfortable; I am a little bit nervous. And thank goodness that has never gone away, that I've never become complacent.

J.L.: Thomas King writes that "the truth about stories is that's all we are." It seems to me that most educators engage in informal storytelling pedagogy. How might one formalize their storytelling pedagogy? Or is this even a good idea for educators to attempt en masse?

PSP.: Well I don't think I could answer a Ph.D. student writing this dissertation by saying that that's not possible. Maybe the presumption of the interview is that it is. And I'd like to think that it is. I'd like to become part of a discussion group or a study group to explore this idea further. I would love to know what other professors do in class. That's why when Carolyn Mamchur mentioned your project, it was extremely interesting to me, that someone was conducting such a systematic study of such a trivial thing.

J.L.: [laughter].

PSP.: But I tend to think that it would be impossible for me to formalize it, because I could formalize my pedagogy by writing a theoretical book on pedagogy or by writing

an autobiography, something like that. But I don't think I would ever find anyone who has my experience in teaching. So, we can all talk about students handing in their papers late or plagiarizing; you know, the frustrations with being on committees. We have those common experiences, but I think the kind of Thomas King idea, that when I tell stories in the act of teaching I am fully myself. Maybe there is another person who understands that; it could be you or Thomas King; so that if I wanted to formalize these principles, I would start with someone of a like mind. Who knows where that study might go?

J.L.: Thank you very much Paul.

PSP.: It was my pleasure, Jeff.

#### **Chapter 4: Summary of the Interviews**

In this chapter, I look at the patterns that emerge from the interview data in chapter 3. For the sake of clarity, while looking for patterns of similarities and differences from the twenty questions used in the interviews, I have subdivided the outcomes into two main categories: i. the challenges associated with storytelling pedagogy, and ii. some considerations for storytelling pedagogy. I have purposely excluded a category that examines the advantages of storytelling pedagogy, because the presumption of this dissertation is that there may be several pedagogical advantages to storytelling in the classroom, which I discussed in chapter 2. I believe that it may be useful first to address any patterns that emerged from the interview data that deal with the origins of being a storyteller.

In response to question 1 of the interview, *How did the use of storytelling with your classes first come about?*, a pattern of similarity was shown. Each of the interviewees maintained that storytelling for them was a natural part of their lives and that they had incorporated storytelling pedagogy for most of their professional teaching careers. “I guess I’m just a storyteller. I am a born storyteller... I started teaching high school when I was only nineteen. And whenever I want to explain something I usually illustrate with a story,” (C.M.); “From the very beginning, my tendency was to always teach through story,” (Y.S., question 1); “in short order, I

guess I developed my own style” [to incorporate stories into teaching] (PSP, question 1).

From that same question, another pattern of similarity presented itself. I found that two of the interviewees identified the influence of another person in helping them to incorporate storytelling into their professional lives. “I was raised by storytellers” (C.M.); “I’d never wanted to be a teacher...But I thought, ‘This guy [a gifted UBC professor during Dr. St. Pierre’s undergraduate studies] does it really well’” (PSP).

While I am clearly an advocate of storytelling pedagogy, there is also a need to recognize and identify what challenges are involved in this pedagogy. The following questions attempt to do so. Question 5, *How do you contend with the students that do not appear to engage with the story(ies) that you may have shared?* illustrated patterns of similarity and difference. The similarities connected with a general acknowledgement that disengagement from the teacher’s story may simply be a result of a student’s dislike of the teacher. “It can often be one student, and they develop a kind of antagonism for the teacher” (Y.S.); “The other way I look at it is accepting the inevitability that some people just aren’t going to like *you*, never mind your stories” (PSP).

The manner of dealing with a student’s disengagement from the teacher’s story(ies) also demonstrated a pattern. All three of the professors agreed that they

would respond to the situation; however, each appeared to take a different course of action.

...I'll go and talk to them and say, 'You know, I'm sorry you don't feel comfortable here. You're not joining in this, but this is the way the class is; it is very intimate and interactive and personal. And really, if you don't like that kind of class, please consider a different class...C.M.

Y.S. felt it best to spend time in thoughtful reflection in response to the problem. "And then the teacher has to spend a lot of his or her time trying to figure out 'What is the problem?' 'Why this negativity?' 'What am I doing wrong?' 'Or what am I doing right?'" PSP reacted by adapting to the problem as he saw it emerge. "I think well, 'I have to be more engaged in my story; I have to tell the story faster or slower, in a louder voice, a softer voice. Whatever. Make the adjustment to win that person over.'"

Perhaps not surprisingly, two of the professors admitted a deep personal response when asked, *How do you contend emotionally with a "defiant" student that simply does not seem to appreciate any story that you share?* "I'm quite upset by that. So, I do take it very personally" (CM); "I don't leave it behind [the memory of that disengaged, defiant student]...I mean, I put my heart and soul into them [his classes]... You know, when I leave a class, having made an emotional commitment in the lecture and feel that it was a failure, it's very painful. It's painful today and the

last class and over the past twenty years” (PSP).

One question that produced a pattern of difference and a pattern of similarity was, *How would you advise a teacher to diffuse a power conflict in the classroom between those that just adored your stories and those that were disengaged and almost spitefully resistant?* “...The only way I could get a person like that [a disengaged and almost spitefully resistant student] on board is to give them an opportunity to shine... I think the only way that I know how to do it is to give them opportunities to be successful” (CM). “And when that happens, I think it’s like anything else in the real world...No, what you do is find allies in the classroom. You build alliances” (YS). “If it was a conflict between two groups of students and the professor, I would probably refrain from telling stories. If it was fifty-fifty: if ten students were disengaged and ten students loved the stories, I would probably think, “I’m going to tone this down, because you know, I don’t want to lose half the class” (PSP).

Upon further reflection, two of the professors regarded the “problem” as a pedagogical opportunity.

But I tend to think theoretically that a conflict of that sort would actually be good in a class, because, unless the students are just isolating themselves in opposite sides of the classroom; if they’re actually engaged in the discussion ...But the point is they’re at least discussing the fact that the professor has a methodology, and he might

have a purpose; and they can evaluate my pedagogy and they are free not to like it, as well as to like it. (PSP)

YS., likewise, regarded a power conflict in the classroom over a teacher's storytelling as an opportunity, provided the story presented represented a universal experience. "And if it isn't a shared experience, then one has to have the right environment in the classroom, so the students are not afraid to say, 'Well maybe that's what X got out of it, but from our perspective, that's what we see in it.' And that's good; that's learning..."

Question 12, *Following a humorous story, for example, how can an educator transition his / her class back to the lesson at hand without compromising or negatively affecting the positive mood of the class?* produced a pattern of agreement on two levels with the interviewees.

Firstly, each of those interviewed agreed that transitioning one's class back from a humorous story to the lesson at hand was a naturally occurring process. "It's a sense of being, and so I never would worry that I'm going lose control of the class because they're laughing at some stupid thing that I did...It would not occur to me that that would happen" (C.M.). "...To get back [to the lesson], I think the idea is timing" (YS). "If the humorous story is thematically related to the lecture or that portion of the lecture, you simply resume, you step out of the comedy and resume the serious lecture by changing the mood, by changing the tone of voice, your body

language and so on” (PSP).

With that same question, a pattern was demonstrated through agreement for the benefit of using a humorous story with one’s class. “I believe that...the more human you are, the more control of the class you have” (CM). “But those moments, rather rare, those moments are really good for a class. It’s good to forget working; you know, to have a break, to do something silly and then get back to scholarship” (PSP).

One significant consideration for storytelling--*How can the instructor guard against a student taking advantage of them in the form of inappropriate closeness or joking?*—produced another pattern that reflected the professors’ agreement. Two of the professors agreed that a teacher’s use of storytelling pedagogy may create some challenges. “...For a young teacher that is very possible” (CM). “a teacher’s narrative style can be abused” (YS). Both of the professors also agreed on the need to respond to any issue surrounding inappropriate responses to storytelling pedagogy. “If I sense it happening I’ll just nip it in the bud” (CM). “...so you have to be sensitive to that, and you have to be prepared how to defend a story” (YS).

PSP.: No response to this question: I omitted asking him this.

In order to present a balanced presentation for my belief that storytelling may be a specific pedagogy to promote student engagement among high school students, I

feel it appropriate to identify different consequences or issues that may arise from this approach. This portion of the dissertation will examine patterns that may emerge from the responses of the professors interviewed. For the sake of clarity and continuity, I have divided their responses under the heading of *Considerations in Storytelling Pedagogy*, with a further subdivision to include *The role of Intimacy and Storytelling Pedagogy*, *How to Implement Storytelling Pedagogy*, and *The Future of Storytelling Pedagogy in a High School Classroom*.

It seems to me that it would be most prudent to begin this portion of the dissertation with an examination of the responses to what I believe fall under the realm of pure considerations for storytelling pedagogy. One of the most basic questions I posed to my panel was *What are some signs or indications that a student has not been engaged by the story you have shared?* Two of the professors agreed that the signs were somewhat obvious to watch for. "...Lots of signs-- crossing their arms, looking down, not making eye contact...not laughing when it's hilariously funny...but if I get a repeated message...a frown, not laughing, crossing arms, not making eye contact, tight lips, and then I know there's no connection: (C.M.).

"...When I teach, I look round the room. I try to make eye contact with everyone in the class. And you can tell from facial expression whether someone is engaged or not... These students are sending me messages in their gestures, their voices and so

on” (PSP).

A pattern of difference revealed itself in the response of one professor. “...This is very difficult to define. These kinds of things are not discipline. It has to do with a dynamic of complexity that exists in the classroom vis-a-vis the bond; you know, and the nature of that bond between the teacher and the students” (YS).

Another pragmatic issue concerning storytelling pedagogy manifested a pattern of agreement, in terms of the benefits of storytelling pedagogy, despite the growing diversity of students represented in the classroom these days. “I think stories are amazing to all human beings and they’re universal. And so it doesn’t matter...The great teachers have always been storytellers” (CM). “I tend to think naively that everyone will get something; whatever their background, everyone will get something from the story. But I think I’m also willing to be dismissed” (PSP). Though YS agreed with the benefits of storytelling pedagogy, despite the growing diversity of students represented in the classroom these days, he introduced one significant consideration. “One has to be very sensitive in a constructional story manner. One has to pitch it in such a manner that it becomes a shared experience,” Specifically, YS addressed the issue from a different perspective. “We love all cultures, but the viewpoints can collide with others. It used to be people would say, ‘Oh common sense is a universal thing’...That’s no longer true. Even common sense is constructed

culturally...” (YS).

One final pure consideration to the discussion produced agreement from two of the three interviewees, regarding sharing a story when in a bad mood. Both agreed it was better not to share under this condition. “I think if you are mad *at* the students, for sure don’t tell a story, because it might secretly have the intention of hurting them, or secretly have the intention of trying to teach them a lesson in a duplicitous way by implying something” (CM). “I would say that one should not tell a story when one is in a bad mood” (YS.).

I believe that one of the major considerations in storytelling pedagogy is found in the intimacy that is created from storytelling pedagogy and how the teacher may deal with this intimacy positively and creatively.

The question that asked, *How do you determine when it is appropriate to tell a story with a class of new students?* revealed a pattern of caring and concern among the professors for their students. “It isn’t appropriate and I do it anyway...My role is to try and create the opportunity for you to learn and then to give you any knowledge I can to help you to learn in a way that’s meaningful for you” (CM). “That does take experience. One can tell the right story to the wrong crowd; or the wrong story, in a sense, I suppose to the right crowd. I mean, it is, you know, right in the sense that they want to learn that way” (YS). “To do that, I think one has to be somewhat

indulgent of students... in some ways I have a custodial, almost custodial-parental role with the students” (PSP).

Another question regarding the intimacy involved in storytelling pedagogy created three divergent responses. When asked whether they considered gender to be a consideration in utilizing storytelling pedagogy, CM maintained, “No I don’t. I think they’re different challenges... Most of the time women can be more personal...whereas a young guy telling some stories might look like he’s trying to get intimate with students by telling these personal stories.” YS took a bit of a different position. “There are certain stories that students associate with the genders.” While PSP seemed to assuage the issue through his approach to utilizing storytelling pedagogy.

I don’t see myself as gendered in the classroom... But I tend to see myself as androgynous in the classroom. To me, you know, not that I have anything like his talent, but I’m androgynous like the Little Tramp, or Pee Wee Herman or, that’s the kind of character I would like to be. I want to be loved like that, like that character; to be funny like that character.

One further question I posed that bespoke of the intimacy involved in storytelling pedagogy revealed two different responses to the role that the teller’s body played in the story and how that informed their telling of the story. To both YS and PSP, the role the teller’s body played in the story was clear. “...The better the

storyteller, the better the body usage, the better the body language, and the better the facial expressions” (YS). “Well, I think it’s all about the body...it’s like offering the class your body...” (PSP). CM took a rather different view. “I don’t think a storyteller is as aware of their body like an athlete type. I think what you are aware of is what’s inside your body; it’s your spiritual consciousness that you’re sensitive to...and that you’re trying to put out there...”

I believe that if one is going to present a specific pedagogy, it is useful to suggest how one might implement it. Several patterns emerged with my panel, regarding questions of implementation.

My question produced two somewhat conflicting responses. In considering storytelling pedagogy with high school students versus university students, CM argued that, “I had to be a little bit careful because I was so young...My stories would have to be...more carefully regulated by the very nature of my youth, a lot, less risqué as the stories I tell now.” PSP’s perspective suggested a different view. “And I think what I do now as a teacher with over twenty years’ experience at this university is not really that much different from what I did that day in high school [to share stories] and it was, it was a really frightening experience for me.”

Y.S.: No response to this question: I omitted asking him this.

A pattern of diversity emerged when I asked, *Do you ever plan ahead what*

*stories you may share / disclose with a class to match a particular theme or lesson?*

CM was succinct in her response. “Not really, if somebody asks me to tell a story “on demand” I probably couldn’t do it...It’s actually whatever comes out of my mouth.”

Likewise, PSP maintained “for the most part I don’t plan ahead.” While YS maintained a balanced view between planning stories ahead to match a particular lesson or theme. “...Yes and no... In some instances, ‘Yes, I have a plan today’ ...On the other hand, if something were to happen in the classroom and I had a story planned at the time that no longer applied; then I could usually think of another one, you know more or less spontaneously...” (YS).

I believe that a next logical question to pursue following one about planning stories ahead of time might be *How do you sense or know how many stories to share with a particular class? How do you gauge when still another story would complement the lesson versus one that wouldn’t?* The responses produced a pattern of similarity in that each professor suggested that experience normally dictated how many stories to share or not to share. “You can sense it, usually” (CM). “...One has to be very, very careful with stories... It’s like giving a child too much dessert after dinner” (YS). “Sometimes I tell too many stories. I think I’m better at avoiding that now than I was maybe ten years ago” (PSP).

And finally for questions regarding implementation, I posed the query whether

all stories told in the classroom were pedagogical or when the line formed between one used to enhance a lesson and one simply to entertain one's class. This prompted a further question: Was there anything wrong with that? Each of the professors seemed to agree that as long as the story or stories told were told in the proper spirit—to support the learning experience—there was nothing the matter with them. For CM, in particular, stories were a natural extension of the teaching. “Stories just instinctively come, and so I don't plan it; and I don't think ‘Oh I've over told or under told’ or any of those things; I don't think of it like that.” YS observed that “there was nothing intrinsically wrong [with sharing a story]...but obviously stories that are not pedagogical can earn a teacher a negative reputation.” “...stories are used for both reasons: pedagogically and for purposes of whatever this means, entertainment. Is there anything wrong with it being the latter? I would say no... unless one is neglecting one's responsibility as a teacher...”

To follow the presumption of this dissertation, it is my concern to identify what sort of future storytelling pedagogy may have and how a teacher may best be prepared to utilize it.

A pattern of agreement, subject to conditions, emerged from my question regarding whether a new teacher should be encouraged to utilize storytelling pedagogy. And if so, how a teacher could develop his/her storytelling pedagogy with

students?

I think it's a method that might work for many people. It'll work for you if you have good stories to tell and you know how to tell them. It'll work for you if you feel comfortable with your humanity and comfortable with your commonality with other human beings; it'll, it'll work for you if, if you have an intuitive ability to sense when a story would make sense at that moment in time, or if needed just to change the atmosphere, or to move the energy along. CM.

“I think it is a great strategy, a great tool, especially for the young teachers. And a young teacher has the great disadvantage that the kids usually know...so the job becomes ten times more difficult...And it depends on again, on the class and to what extent does this young teacher have (control in) developing the situation” (YS).

Well, in answer to the first part of your question, I would say yes and no ...If telling stories makes a teacher comfortable, if it allows her or him to engage with the students, then by all means they should pursue that..., if encouraging a new teacher to tell stories as part of their pedagogy means that they will have the experience that I have; then I would not do it. I would not want anyone to have my experience in the classroom. (PSP)

In closing, I was interested in the potential for attempting to formalize storytelling pedagogy. The interview data revealed a pattern of agreement that to seek to formalize story telling pedagogy would be a mistake. CM noted her disapproval in an earlier question (#15). “The questions you're asking me suggest that there is a, a formula that's a mechanical thing- like do you sit down at home and you say 'Ok, I'm going to teach this and here's the story that I'd use to teach it with.' With the way that

I work that *isn't* what happens..." "I think it's ok for educators to analyze their own stories for themselves, but I think there is a certain danger in looking for formulas..."

At the end of the day, a great story defies a definitive formula, and if you try to create a definitive process for it, I think it'll backfire" (YS). "...I tend to think that it would be impossible for me to formalize it..." (PSP).

## **Chapter 5: Lessons Learned**

In this chapter, I look at the lessons that I have learned from the responses and the patterns that emerged from the interview data in chapter 4. I have come to have a number of my own theories validated. I have also come to welcome a number of ideas that I had not considered previous to this work.

One of the notions to emerge from the data was the innate sense that the educators I spoke with had with regard to telling their stories. To a person, they professed a natural integration of telling stories with their students. For me as well, sharing stories from nearly the start of my teaching journey seemed to both fulfill a need within me, for the students to recognize my humanity, that I was not simply instructor X before them, but that I, too, was a member of the human race, wanting them to succeed because they too were members of the human race.

I was also struck by the unaffected manner that the interviewees expressed how their own storytelling pedagogy first came about. For most, it appeared to be a natural extension of their being. That is, their stories were an innate part of their humanity. Whether they were “born storytellers” like Mamchur or did it in part to emulate an inspiring role model, storytelling became a vital piece of their teaching tools.

Another lesson that I learned from this research was how, even at the highest

levels of academia and with a wealth of diverse teaching experience, one could still be vulnerable in his or her role as an educator. Perhaps this is not surprising, as each interviewee indicated to me that teaching was an intimate pursuit. However, I was interested in the fact that all of the professors had made an emotional commitment to their teaching. This was made clear to me particularly when talking about defiant students that did not engage with a teacher's story. Each of the professors expressed a measure of distress when this had happened. I have also had to contend with the reality of students disengaging with me, despite my best efforts to make the story interesting or engaging. However, I took solace from the professors' insights that sometimes it was neither the story nor the manner of the telling that provoked the student's disengagement, but rather the student's own dislike of the teacher that could motivate the disengagement in the first place. I learned or perhaps had this idea affirmed through the interview response that suggested, were that the case, it was almost inevitable that one or more students will find fault with a teacher and likely disengage. This brings me back to the importance of relationship in teaching. I believe that this to be a fundamental element to successful teaching.

As was made clear to me in the interviews, teaching is a joyful activity. I have long held that this is largely because of the positive interaction that could be achieved with students. I think that this has to do more with the teacher's own attitude than the

students' disposition. I had a colleague once put it this way. "A teacher's default setting is kindness." I thought that was accurate because of the need to remember that a teacher is dealing with human beings, with all of their troubles and concerns, for as a Yugoslav proverb reminds us, "Man is harder than rock and more fragile than an egg"(retrieved from <http://www.quotegarden.com/human.html> on Friday, September 2, 2011). I believe that in teaching there is a place for compassion and flexibility in dealing with teenagers and young adults. And as one of the panel suggested, "In some ways I have a custodial, almost custodial-parental role with the students." All of which brings me back to the thought that storytelling and teaching are, in a sense, natural and may be done with that recognition in mind.

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I suggested that "using the power of narrative may create a living tradition in one's classroom. I believe that it is up to the teacher to infuse the lesson with life, love, passion, and a sense of wonder and discovery" (p. 28). In talking with each of the professors' interviewed and from reflecting on my own teaching practice, this truth has become more apparent. I agree with W. Somerset Maugham. "Every production of an artist should be the expression of an adventure of his soul" (retrieved from <http://creatingminds.org/quotes/artists.htm> on Wednesday, October 12, 2011). I am dazzled by the notion of teacher as artist, one in which the classroom may be the canvas and the students an active and discerning audience. This

vibrant canvas is where I invite teachers to create a living tradition, each and every class, filled with stories and a deep sense of engagement.

Just as there seems to be a natural and appropriate moment when to share a story in the classroom or to “somehow know” when one has shared enough stories, or how to bring a class back to the business at hand, I have learned that much of one’s success in teaching may be realized through attentiveness to one’s own sincere intent and one’s conviction to be without pretence. Perhaps like a loving parent, one must administer stories with care. As one interviewee put it, “...One has to be very, very careful with stories... It’s like giving a child too much dessert after dinner” (YS).

One further lesson I gained from the interview data was the importance of broadening my perspective to the ancillary benefits of storytelling. I was able to appreciate that when some students invariably did not engage with the story that it could still lead to a discussion of pedagogy amongst the students. The key, as I understand it at this point, is to remove my ego from the experience.

But I tend to think theoretically that a conflict of that sort would actually be good in a class, because, unless the students are just isolating themselves in opposite sides of the classroom; if they’re actually engaged in the discussion ...But the point is they’re at least discussing the fact that the professor has a methodology, and he might have a purpose; and they can evaluate my pedagogy and they are free not to like it, as well as to like it. (PSP)

I believe that a teacher necessarily makes oneself vulnerable in order to reach the

students. Perhaps this vulnerability is simply the consequence of reaching out to another human being, as with any relationship, there is an inherent need for openness which necessitates vulnerability.

One further notion that I had affirmed from the research was the universality of stories (i.e., “I tend to think naively that everyone will get something; whatever their background, everyone will get something from the story...” (PSP); “I think stories are amazing to all human beings...I don’t think there’s anybody of any culture on planet earth that doesn’t like storytellers” (CM). One presumption I had made regarding storytelling pedagogy was amended by an insight from one of the panel. “We love all cultures, but the viewpoints can collide with others. It used to be people would say, ‘Oh common sense is a universal thing’...That’s no longer true. Even common sense is constructed culturally...” (YS). I learned that to be effective in using storytelling pedagogy with a class, it is helpful to appeal to those aspects of the human experience which are universal, hope, fear, loyalty etc., and to be sensitive to the use of idiomatic and regional language when telling a story and to avoid presumptions that for example, that, the exchange students will know about the PNE (the Pacific National Exhibition).

Finally, perhaps the most instructive lesson that I learned from the work on this dissertation was the problem(s) in trying to formalize storytelling pedagogy.

Based on my research, I contend that the need for one's integrity, that is, the teacher's need to be true to himself or herself is at the heart of successful teaching. I believe that stories cannot be forced upon another, nor can they be successful without a sincere intention to promote learning, whatever that may mean at the time of the telling (i.e. to introduce a lesson, to combat student boredom, to illustrate a point, or to promote student engagement). I believe that trying to formalize storytelling pedagogy would be akin to teaching artists to paint by numbers and expecting free thought and a naturalness of expression from the endeavour. "At the end of the day, a great story defies a definitive formula" (YS). I tend to believe that a teacher's unique lived experience creates the opportunity for the benefits that I have argued for in this dissertation. However, I believe that it may be because each teacher is a unique human being, bringing a unique lived experience with them that refutes the formalization of storytelling pedagogy with students. "...I tend to think that it would be impossible for me to formalize it, because I could formalize my pedagogy by writing a theoretical book on pedagogy or by writing an autobiography, something like that. But I don't think I would ever find anyone who has my experience in teaching" (PSP).

*Welcome, Rain*

*As I walked out from the store today,  
people rushed past  
me  
to get out of the rain or into their cars.*

*People scrambled past  
me.  
Pulling their hoods tightly around their heads.  
Perhaps this is what led  
me  
to unzip my jacket.  
I didn't want to blend in.  
I didn't want            one            drop of rain to miss,  
me.*

*I turned my face up  
to meet it,  
to greet it,  
to celebrate it,  
like a snail in Heaven.  
Me.*

*I thought about my students,  
as I let the rain baptize  
Me!  
Refresh  
Me!  
Exhilarate  
Me!  
Do I awaken them?  
Do I model gratitude?  
me?*

*DO I teach them to slow down?  
DO I teach them to look around  
when others are looking away?*

*me?*

*Do I make them wonder?*

*Do I fill them with a hunger  
for looking in life's crevices  
wet or dry?*

*me?*

*As I trod back to the furthest part  
of the parking lot--I enjoy walking a lot—*

*I wondered,*

*Was I making myself known to them?*

*Me?*

*Was I a source  
of replenishment?*

*Me?!*

*Would they see beauty?*

*Would they see oppression?*

*Or would they simply scurry  
to their cars*

*bent over, draped in gear*

*to block out*

*another experience?*

*Me!!*

*I*

*want them to stretch the full height that their bodies will unravel and travel.*

*I*

*want them to move at their own speed.*

*I*

*want them to journey  
around the world in a thousand books.*

*I*

*want to share the rain with them.*

*It is my gift to them.*

*It will be with them forever,*

*long after*

*I  
am gone from their lives.  
Rain will make them stand up,  
and walk their walk  
carefully but confidently*

*I like to think about  
Them  
doing beautiful things and  
laughing when it rains.*

By Jeffrey Lannan

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