

Finding Yemaya's Sisters: Exploring Multimodal Approaches in Teacher Reflective Practice

by

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Abstract

This study documents the three-year experience of a group of four women teachers who met regularly to reflect on their practice collaboratively using multimodal forms of Inquiry and expression. Prompted by the difficulty of integrating more traditional (university-based) strategies for reflection, such as journal writing, into their teaching lives, they explored their lives within and beyond teaching through conversation, poetry, photography, movement, and visual art. Their collective practice was informed by theoretical strands well established in teacher education regarding reflection and by feminist, critical, arts-based, and multimodal educational theory. In this study I document the initial formation of the group and its development into a close-knit community, and I analyze the wide variety of texts that resulted from this collaboration. I examine how engaging in artistic practices enriched the group conversations about teaching and contributed to the development of a reflective discourse that differed from traditional teacher reflective practice in three key ways: by acknowledging the presence of the body in reflection, by welcoming multiple identities and multiple knowledges, and by employing multiple forms of expression. I also examine tensions that resulted from my dual position in the group as both a participating teacher-inquirer and as a researcher-documenter. Drawing from a variety of research traditions and methodologies, including feminist research, participatory action research, ethnography, arts-based inquiry, and indigenous research, I articulate a credo for research that allowed me to address the conflicts associated with occupying both identity positions simultaneously. I offer the perspective that reflection is situated practice and suggest that a broader approach to teacher reflection is needed. I suggest that teacher reflective practice can benefit both from a multimodal approach and from the freedom to range freely between identities and life experiences rather than being limited to analysis of educational theory, philosophy or classroom experience.

Keywords: teacher reflection; collaborative reflective practice and multimodality; arts-based teacher reflection; embodied knowing; metaphor in research

*To my Sisters of Inquiry—goddesses all!—with
gratitude for your wisdom, questions, courage,
creativity, laughter, and commitment.*

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Chapter 1.

A problem: Teacher reflection in the real world

“What is the point of education? Wow, I haven’t heard that question since my teacher-training year. Let’s see...I’ll have to think about it for a minute. Just let me return these two phone calls from parents and fill out a deposit slip for the field trip money I collected this morning. I could think while I’m walking back upstairs to my room—I need to make sure I have enough copies of Macbeth for tomorrow’s English 11 class. (If I don’t, I’ll have to go down to the basement to get some more. That’ll take a while—I could think a bit while I’m going down there). And then I need to sign out the video projector and make a set of handouts, if the photocopier is fixed yet, before I go to the staff meeting. On the way home I have to pick up a new chord for connecting my iPod to the speakers in my dance class—and get some groceries—but I could probably do a bit of thinking while I’m driving. After supper, let’s see... the kids have piano lessons, and then we can’t skip our nightly chapter of The Hunger Games. When they’re in bed I must remember to pay some bills online and answer a bunch of e-mails. I also have a class set of projects to mark, but that should be done by 11:30 or midnight. I’m not going to be able to do much thinking till I get in the bath, and I really won’t be at my best by then—but really, it’s such a great question, isn’t it?”

This was, without exaggeration, my life as a teacher. I wrote this monologue as part of a paper for my Masters degree—it represents a pretty faithful picture of the demands on my time at the end of a school day. At the best of times, the teaching life is a juggling performance. It is a constant condition of struggling to balance curricular preparation, the needs of students, and other work obligations with the demands of family, household chores, health needs, social commitments—and, for me, graduate school. As a full-time public school teacher, I found it impossible to fulfill all these responsibilities as fully as I would have liked. I relished the time I spent reading, discussing, and writing about important educational issues, and I often incorporated

those new perspectives into my work. But it was always a struggle to weave those university assignments into my hectic life—I constantly felt that I was ‘spread too thin’, shortchanging one responsibility to fulfill another, and that no commitment ever really got one hundred percent of my time and energy—not even my husband or children. It is an exhausting way to live, and once my degree requirements were met, only rarely did I sit down in a quiet place and devote concentrated time to the kind of thorough and critical thinking and writing that I had so enjoyed. Out of necessity, my reflections on my teaching were woven into the time I spent preparing for my classes and into frequent conversations with friends and colleagues. My practice was certainly not static—I spent a lot of time thinking back over previous lessons and goals as I planned for future teaching, I often made charts, diagrams, or mind maps that helped move my thinking forward, and I had frequent conversations with colleagues and friends about practical, theoretical, or ethical educational issues—but I could not seem to find a way to sit down by myself and write out my thoughts. Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) have recognized the obstacles to reflection inherent in public school working conditions:

If we look closely at how teachers generally reflect, often influenced by the specific school culture, we see that the pressure of work often encourages a focus on obtaining a ‘quick fix’—a rapid solution for a practical problem—rather than shedding light on the underlying issues (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 48)

I would not say that I ignored “the underlying issues”, but they had to be woven into the pressing demands of classroom effectiveness (and survival).

When, after completing my Masters degree, I moved from the public school system into a faculty associate position in teacher education at Simon Fraser University, my reflective practice was, as before, integrated into my course planning and lesson planning; I expressed my commitment to reflection by assigning regular reflective tasks *to my students*. Faced with many professional challenges in a new setting, I continued to grow and progress pedagogically, and in the university setting I had more opportunities to address those “underlying issues”, but by academic standards my own reflecting was inconsistent, sporadic, improvised, and often rushed and superficial. I recognize the irony pointed out by Butterwick, Dawson and Munro (2007) in their inquiry into their own academic lives: “We don’t stand back and look at our conditions of work,

even though that's what we tell everyone else they should be doing" (p. 2); and, like Linda Crafton (2005), a university teacher educator who frankly assessed her own teaching, I was "not walking the walk". I felt uncomfortable and hypocritical expecting from students—most of whom were also full time teachers—reflective work that I was apparently unable to manage myself. I knew I needed to find a way to integrate systematic reflection into my hectic professional practice. I found little help in the theoretical literature on teacher reflection. Among the many scholarly analyses of reflection, theoretical models and categorizations of reflection, and exhortations to engage in reflection, there are few suggestions regarding how best to weave it into a teaching life. The literature is similarly vague regarding what teacher reflection actually looks like in the field, outside of a university program. While theoretical conceptions of reflective practice and its implementation and assessment in teacher education are well documented, empirical studies in the field are relatively scarce (Rodgers & Scott, 2008), and the literature is peppered with calls for more research. "Theorists exhort teachers to assume agency, find their voice, and take the authority to shape their own professional paths and identities. Left largely unexplored by this literature, however, is the black box of how..." (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 733).

As I sought possible solutions to this problem, two important considerations became clear: I wanted to work on this problem collaboratively, and I wanted to involve multimodal or arts-based methods. These priorities were prompted by both theory and experience. Some years earlier, I had participated in the Teacher Action Research Group (TARG), led by Dr. Kelleen Toohey at SFU. We were a group of women teachers, graduate students, and a video ethnographer who met weekly over several years to talk about questions and issues in educational practice. Many of the members were engaged in graduate work while teaching full time, and our dialogue was a rich interweaving of classroom stories, wonderings, and theoretical perspectives. Talking about practice in a focused and grounded way, making connections to educational research and theory, did not necessarily provide *answers* to complex dilemmas; however, I experienced the power of discussing questions with thoughtful colleagues who understood 'from the inside' and who were willing to listen and to share their own perceptions and ideas. I had also read studies of similar groups (Applebaum & Stern, 2013; El-Haj, 2003; Koba & Mitchell, 2008) and was impressed by the longevity and

effectiveness of these groups. Clearly, intellectual, effective, and sustaining reflection could be done collaboratively.

My interest in the arts began with childhood lessons in music and dance and extended into my adult experiences teaching dance in public school and drama/movement at the university. These joyful experiences, both as a learner and a teacher, combined with readings in my graduate studies, convinced me that thinking and reflecting can be effectively accomplished through media other than writing. Although an overwhelming percentage of teacher reflection I had either read about or been asked to undertake in my own education had involved 'reflective (prose) writing', I had seen some examples of the use of visual journals, music, movement, and improvisational drama in university teacher education classes. The effectiveness of these non-print expressions was supported by theoretical work on two different academic fronts: by arts-based inquirers and aesthetic educators such as Elliot Eisner and Maxine Greene on the one hand, and on the other by multimodal theorists such as Gunther Kress and Carey Jewitt. Encountering these scholars prompted me to wonder: What modes other than journal writing might teachers *in the field* choose to use to reflect on their practice? And in what ways might those alternative modes constrain or enable their reflections?

I decided to invite several like-minded colleagues to explore this inquiry with me. I wanted to make a study of this collaboration, to document the journey of a group of teachers who held a similar vision of the aims of teaching and the value of the arts and who could identify with each other's challenges (and triumphs) as we struggled to bring that vision to life in our work. Reflective practice is widely used in pre-service teacher education as a means of helping student-teachers coalesce a 'professional identity': 'What kind of teacher do I want to be?' But teachers don't stop asking that question as soon as they are hired to a full-time position. I knew I wanted to work with experienced teachers, teachers who recognized that the act of teaching occurs in a highly political context heavy with contradictions and contentious issues, who had weathered Ministry edicts, educational fads, parental concerns, political conflicts, media criticism, and curriculum innovations, teachers who agreed that our identities are fluid and shifting within this volatile field and that reflection needs to be a continuing process of self-definition just as much for experienced teachers as for novices. I shared the perspective expressed by Gary Poole:

For educators, being in the present demands a willingness to confront the here and now. Again, this confrontation requires courage, as does the reflection that follows it. Why? Perhaps we are never fully adequate in a profession for which there is no ceiling on adequacy. We can always get better, and our inner work exposes the gap between who we are and who we could be. (Poole, 2012, p. 10)

“What do I really believe about teaching, schools, and education in general? How closely does my teaching practice align with those beliefs? Am I being the kind of teacher I want to be? What things do I need to change? What things are beyond my control or out of my range? How do I respond to those things?” These were the kinds of questions I wanted to explore collaboratively and multimodally.

Furthermore, as this began as a pilot study with a limited time frame, I needed participants who I knew were experienced in and open to exploring non-print, non-literal media. Through my faculty associate work co-ordinating graduate diplomas in arts education, I had met a number of teachers, mostly women, who shared these interests. Of the six women I invited to participate, three were willing and available: two had been former students and one had been a co-instructor. The teachers who took up my invitation are all, as am I, white, middle-aged, middle-class women with a background in one or more performing arts. All of us included the arts in our classroom practice, and all of us had recently completed or were pursuing graduate work in education. Over the two months of the pilot study we met three times on the Simon Fraser University campus. Between meetings we agreed to exchange by email some form of non-prose reflection. These meetings, and the reflective pieces we created, were so enjoyable and effective, we all agreed to continue to meet and create after the pilot study was over, a pattern that we maintained for three years. I made video-recordings of these meetings and collected the creative work, and also made video-recordings of individual interviews with group members, all of which has formed the substance of this study.

This dissertation, then, is my account of our group collaboration: how we got started, what we did, how the group evolved, and what it meant to us. I want to honour the voices of the women who participated with me and shared themselves and their lives. I want to assess what we may have gained or lost by reflecting in this collaborative and multimodal way. Woven into this story are my beliefs about research

and about teaching, reflection, arts education, multimodal education, and meaning-making as well as the scholarly work that has influenced my thinking and my actions.

In the next chapter I will outline the theoretical context within which this study was situated, drawing together strands from scholarly work in reflective practice, arts education, and multimodal social semiotics. Chapter 3 articulates the principles on which my research methodology and method were based and addresses a tension I experienced as I shifted between being a participant of the group and the researcher studying the group. In Chapter 4 I introduce the members of the group and describe how we formed a group identity, highlighting the role of our creative work in facilitating that process. Chapters 5 and 6 comprise my analysis of the various texts that resulted from our collaboration, identifying key themes in our conversations and writings about teaching in Chapter 5 and describing in Chapter 6 the central features of our collaborative discourse as it developed. In Chapter 7 I explore the meaning that our experience held for the members of the group, identifying several benefits and a possible loss. Chapter 8 suggests three implications of this research for those engaged in teacher reflective practice or in exploring a scholarly understanding of teacher reflection.

Chapter 2.

Weaving theoretical strands: Reflection, collaboration, the arts, and multimodality

2.1. Introduction

A desire to reflect on our work collaboratively and to do so in a variety of ways brought our group together. Having been steeped in education for most of our lives as both teachers and students, we shared deep concerns regarding the way that language “has been treated as the key to an understanding of learning and to ways of knowing; to forms of teaching; to kinds of assessment/evaluation” (Kress, 2011, p. 206). Every day in our schools we were reminded of the ways that members of the education community at all levels (students, teachers, administrators, scholars) were being assessed and assigned identities on their abilities to read, write, and speak according to the expectations of linguistic genres, settings, and situations. We shared a certain skepticism regarding the narrowness of this privileging of linguistic expression; we were not blind to the “intricate ties between language, personal identity, and issues of power” (Hagood, 2000, p. 317) and we believed with Eisner (2002) that

Meaning is not limited to what words can express. ... Some meanings are ‘readable’ and expressible through literal language; other meanings require literary forms of language; still others demand *other* forms through which meanings can be represented and shared. (Eisner, 2002, p. 230)

We were drawn together largely by our wish to support each other in finding ways to expand our students’ learning options through alternate modes of expression, and we wanted to extend that freedom to ourselves in our reflective practice.

In the process of interpreting the records of our shared journey, I found it useful to draw on key strands in rather disparate bodies of literature. In this chapter I outline and connect those strands.

2.2. Reflective Practice

My study touches on three features of reflective practice literature. The first is that defining ‘reflective practice’ seems to be impossible: although the term is widely used and the practice is widespread in education, no single, authoritative definition exists (Beauchamp, 2006; Collin, Karsenti & Komis, 2013; Fendler, 2003; Hatton & Smith, 1995). Second, while there is a great deal of research and theorizing devoted to advocating, describing, and analyzing applications of reflective practice in education, most of this work relates to its use in university-based teacher education programs (Collin, et al., 2013; Fendler, 2003; Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005; Ottesen, 2007; Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Very little attention is given to documenting or exploring teachers’ reflective practices in the field. Finally, documented examples of teacher reflective practice consistently demonstrate that writing, particularly journal writing, is almost universally regarded as the best or only strategy for engaging in serious reflection (Fendler, 2003; Larrivee, 2000; Russell, 2005; Threlfall, 2013). Our group’s interest in exploring forms of expression beyond prose writing—and what we gained or lost by doing so—has been further illuminated by elements of arts education literature (Eisner, 2002; Fowler, 1996; Greene, 1995; Jensen, 2002) and multiliteracies theory, in particular multimodal social semiotics (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2011). Also useful has been the small body of literature discussing iterations of collaborative reflective practice (Cohen et al., 2012; Glazer, Abbott & Harris, 2004; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Tigelaar, Dolmans, Meijer, deGrave & van der Vleuten, 2008). In this chapter I will draw from these different perspectives in order to:

[1] provide a brief outline of attempts to define ‘reflective practice’ and clarify my use of the term in this study

[2] describe teacher reflection as it is typically advocated, taught, implemented and assessed in university teacher education

[3] discuss key points from arts education literature and multiliteracies theory/multimodal social semiotics that help to illuminate the desire of our group members to step outside conventional academic models of reflective practice

2.2.1. Teacher reflective practice: Ubiquitous but undefined

Teacher research is described as a way of knowing. Advocates champion the idea that classroom experiences provide a core source of knowledge and that reflection on practice is the primary means for tapping into that knowledge. Teacher educators like myself picked up the mantra of “reflective practitioner” (Schon, 1983) and insisted that teachers engage in inquiry and reflection at every turn. Models of reflection proliferated and the process of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action and reflection-for-transformation rushed over the profession like a tidal wave. In my own classes, students kept reflective journals and dialogue journals, and completed exit slips before they left the classroom. My three-hour weekly sessions with graduate students were sprinkled with time for reflection: “reflect on the experience you just had,” “reflect on your current definition of literacy,” “reflect, reflect, reflect”. (Crafton, 2005, p. 3)

Linda Crafton’s enthusiastic implementation of reflective practice in her teacher education classes exemplifies a “tidal wave” of practice that is well documented in teacher education literature. An extensive body of work spanning forty years attests to the significance of ‘reflection’ and ‘reflective practice’ in teacher preparation and teacher education (Barton & Ryan, 2014; Ottesen, 2007). In a comprehensive survey of the literature on pre-service teacher preparation programs, Collin, Karsenti and Komis (2013) identify reflection as “a key competency in Western initial teacher training programs”, to the extent that it has become “a dominant education paradigm” (Collin et al., 2013, p. 105). And yet, despite this documented ubiquity and influence, the literature demonstrates a disconcerting degree of fuzziness in the meaning and intentions ascribed to ‘reflective practice’: “the very concept remains ambiguous and contentious (Beauchamp, 2006; Fendler, 2003)...and it stands in danger of becoming another catchword for education reform” (Collin et al., 2013, p. 104-105).

In general, reflective practice describes a constellation of learning activities engaged in by professionals aiming to improve their practice. “Across the diversity of perspectives and positions, reflection is generally assumed to promote understanding and insight and to have transformation or empowerment as its purpose or effect” (Ottesen, 2007, p. 32). Reflection or reflective practice typically refers to a self-analytic, meaning-making process leading to changed perceptions and/or performance. Rather than learning by receiving knowledge from experts in a didactic setting, practitioners look back on and recapture a professional experience, analyze what happened, examine

their thoughts and feelings and those of other participants, making sense of it all in light of previous knowledge and core beliefs to arrive at a new insight or higher level of understanding regarding their work. The work of Donald Schön (1983,1987) is widely accepted as fundamental in establishing the acceptance of reflection as a key element of professional learning and practice. However, his work has by no means provided an uncontested definition of what it is, its aims, or how to go about it.

Schön's work (1983, 1987) is often considered a watershed, initiating what has been labeled 'the reflective turn' (Schön, 1991). However, the seminal impact of Dewey (1910/1997) and Van Manen (1977, 1991) has strongly influenced the development of a variety of understandings and perspectives on reflection in education....The ideals or purposes of reflection in education are as manifold as the term itself: development of self-monitoring teachers, teachers as experimenters, teachers as researchers, teachers as inquirers, teachers as activists, to mention but a few. (Ottesen, 2007, pp. 31-32)

Reflection often designates a cognitive process that may serve several purposes; for example, pre-service teachers are asked to reflect on their own learning histories in order to uncover unconscious assumptions and biases, to reflect on their reasons for wanting to teach, or to analyze their own strengths and weaknesses in relation to valued teaching dispositions (Brookfield, 1995; Palmer, 1998; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009; Hubbard & Power, 2003). Experienced teachers in graduate programs are asked to use reflection as they "critically examine their practice, seek the advice of others, and draw on educational research to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgement, and adapt their teaching to new findings and ideas" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 842). Many scholars avoid any attempt at a single, authoritative definition for this deeply personal, complex activity. For example, after her detailed analysis of reflective practice literature, Beauchamp (2006) did not hazard a definition; nor, seven years later, did Collin et al. (2013) after surveying literature on reflective practice in pre-service teacher education. They do mention that the call for such a definition exists:

According to Rattleff (2006) on the subject of the term 'reflection' and its synonyms, 'The scientific literature should provide clear definitions and make consistent use of these terms, which is also a precondition for carrying out empirical research'. (quoted in Collin et al., 2013, p. 113)

I disagree with Rattleff and maintain that a single, comprehensive and complete definition is neither possible nor necessary. Taken as a whole, the literature suggests that the one uncontested claim we can make about reflection and reflective practice is that these terms represent a wide array of processes and products; clearly, reflection is a multifaceted, somewhat mysterious and quintessentially human activity that cannot be pinned down to a single clear and consistent definition.

For the purpose of this study I will use the terms 'reflection' and 'reflective practice' interchangeably, as is common (though not quite universal) in the literature. Further, although 'reflection' and 'reflective practice' appear to be singular, I include within these terms a plurality of processes and approaches. Beauchamp's (2006) comprehensive survey of the processes, objects, and rationales of reflective practice provides a model which accurately describes the activities of our study group. We engaged in a range of *processes* of reflection: examining, thinking and understanding, problem solving, analyzing, evaluating and/or constructing, developing and transforming. These processes took place in relation to particular *objects*—practice, social knowledge, experience, information, theories, meaning, beliefs, self and/or issues of concern—and were intended to achieve a particular *goal or goals*: to think differently or more clearly, justify one's stance, think about actions or decisions, change thinking or knowledge, take or improve action, improve student learning, alter self or society (drawing from Beauchamp, 2006). Our approach further concurred with two additional qualities of reflection proposed by Collin et al. (2013). First, our understanding matched their definition of reflection as "grounded" in action in that it arises from (although is not confined to) a specific event. And their second observation was also resonant with our practice: that reflection is "generic" in that it is not entirely confined to professional life but encompasses other aspects of personal life (Collin et al., 2013, p. 106). The reflective practice(s) undertaken by our group included at some point all of the above qualities, processes, and intentions, and this multifaceted, shifting quality is key to the way I am defining reflection in this study.

In order to understand the development of a collaborative reflective practice in our research group, it is necessary first to examine as a backdrop the approaches to reflection that are commonly implemented in university teacher education. I want to highlight two prominent conventions of teacher reflection as it is taught, enacted and

assessed in university programs: [1] a seemingly unquestioned reliance on writing as the most effective reflective tool, and [2] the dissection of reflection into ‘levels’ or stages. As I hope to show in Chapters 5 and 6, negotiating differences in priorities, epistemologies, practices, and values between the academy and the field was significant in defining our group practice.

2.2.2. Reflection as an academic literacy: ‘The classic recipe’

Emphasis on writing

The language-centred approach described by Linda Crafton (2005) above has evidently been widely adopted in university-based teacher education: as well as participating in verbal presentations and formal or informal discussion (both face-to-face and online), teacher candidates and graduate students are frequently asked to keep ongoing reflective journals, write short reflections at the end of class, develop reading and writing portfolios, and reflect in on-line exchanges. Throughout this literature there is a consistent emphasis on language as a medium for thinking and for expression, evidence of a long-standing tradition in academic pedagogy:

[Education evinces] a centuries’ long commonplace in ‘Western’ thinking which had treated language as the sine qua non of rationality as much as of ‘humanity’.... ‘Language’ was taken as *the* means for the ‘realization’—making real and material—of ‘knowledge’; as the *major* route and vehicle for learning and knowing; as the provider—in the form of a ‘meta-language’—of means for reflection. (Kress, 2011, p. 206)

I will return to the connection between language and academic education later, but for the moment I simply want to emphasize the centrality of language—both spoken and written—in academic practice and culture, and the valorization of prose writing in particular.

One particular writing activity occurs with striking predominance in reflective practice literature: the use of journals seems to have become extremely common if not actually entrenched in teacher education (Russell, 2005; Threlfall, 2013). Journal writing is extolled as multipurpose: for example, a journal can serve as a location for working through and solving problems, for collecting new teaching ideas, or for recording events to be reflected on later (Farrell, 2013).

Journals can provide a safe haven for dumping daily frustrations, working through internal conflicts, recording critical incidents, posing questions, naming issues, solving problems, identifying relationships, seeing patterns over time, and tracing life patterns and themes. (Larrivee, 2000, p. 297)

While skeptics do exist (Fendler, 2003; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Russell, 2005) and alternatives to journalling are explored (Russell, 2005), the connection between reflection and writing remains strong; even in education programs which invite students to experiment with other forms of expression, such as visual representation or role play, final assessments require prose writing (Kress, 2011). Journal writing is valued because it both slows down the reflective process and also captures impressions, incidents, and thoughts for further exploration or analysis. “The very act of writing has its own built-in reflective mechanism that makes it an ideal tool for helping teachers pause and thus engage in systematic reflections of their practice” (Farrell, 2013, p. 469). Being a reflective and ethical practitioner “begins with teacher self-awareness, self-inquiry, and self-reflection, not with the students” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 293); for Larrivee, “making time for solitary reflection” (p. 296) is essential to developing this necessary self-awareness, and she recommends journal writing as one way of ensuring that time is purposefully set aside. Finally, writing transforms an invisible, private activity into a material, public product which can be assessed and therefore fits neatly into the university discourse of evaluation and grading. Since prose writing is an expected competency of anyone applying for university entrance, journal writing is often immediately implemented without any further training on the part of students or instructors. In the context of teacher education reflection is a literacy *practice* and writing a journal entry a literacy *event* (Maybin, 2000). The resulting text accords with academic traditions of introspection, precise Standard English expression, and assessment of learning through written documents. In other words, reflective journal writing is an academic literacy honouring academic values of contemplation, analysis, rationality, linguistic precision, and solo sedentary work. It should be no surprise that journals find such a hospitable home in teacher education; however, finding time for solitary reflection is extremely difficult in the teaching life, and as arts educators and artists, we believed that journal writing did not always fulfil our expressive needs.

Collaborative reflection: Limited and rare

While individual reflection is certainly meaningful, in some cases, collaborative reflection can promote deeper reflection. In collaborative reflection, individuals reflect through group discussion and discourse. The experience is not purely an individual process, but it is a process in which learners construct meaning in a situated context (Kim & Lee, 2002). Discussing and comparing experiences with others deepens the learning experience. Collaborative reflection helps teachers refine their teaching skills and approaches to teaching and provides a means for improvement. ... By reflecting together, teachers can take their knowledge to the next level through deeper analysis, application, and evaluation. (Epler, Drape, Broyles & Rudd, 2013, p. 49)

Although strong claims for the value of collaborative reflection, such as this one, are recognized in the literature (Glazer, Abbott & Harris, 2004; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Tigelaar, Dolmans, Meijer, deGrave & van der Vleuten, 2008), there are few empirical studies, reflecting perhaps the challenges of *evaluating* the effectiveness of reflective practice in any of its iterations, particularly in a collaborative setting. As with reflection in general, the term ‘collaborative reflection’ has no clear definition but covers a wide range of reflective activities and practices. Many of these (relatively rare) studies are devoted to developing reflective habits and skills in pre-service teachers and are narrowly focused on peer observation of classroom performance followed by peer-to-peer or peer-to-mentor discussion (Epler, Drape, Broyles & Rudd, 2013; Yousif, 2014); another significant proportion encourage collaborative reflective discussions online (Naidu, 1997; Campos, Laferrier & Lapointe, 2005). Neither of these models connected to our study group’s interests or needs. I did discover, however, three accounts of collaborative reflection that I found helpful—unfortunately, I did not encounter them until my study was completed, but I was very interested to see strong parallels with our group experience. Woodcock, Lassonde, & Rutten (2004) formed a reflective triad and discovered that the trust and intimacy of their relationships were as significant to their learning as the structure of their reflective process. In a study by Glazer, Abbot & Harris (2004) a group of elementary teachers interested in developing their reflective habits collaboratively designed their own reflective practice model and tested it out with colleagues over a semester. And most relevant, in *Speaking of Teaching: ...Inclinations, Inspirations, and Innerworkings*, (Cohen et al., 2012), a group of teacher educators describe the value of meeting regularly over six years to share reflective “inner work” through poetry, other

personal writing, and art. One member of this collective, Marion Porath, expresses a view shared by our study group:

I would argue that when art is a part of a larger discussion about education and educators' inner lives and inner work it adds another dimension to thinking about and representing the work we do. It became woven into my colleagues' poetic, philosophical, Socratic, and living inquiry representations—mutually complementing the metaphors and analogies we derive to think about our practice. (Porath, 2012, p. 38)

What these accounts acknowledge—and indeed, highlight—is missing from much of the literature but was central to our own experience: ie., an emphasis on relationships and emotional engagement. On this theme, I found a study by de Castell and Jenson (2003) to be very helpful in illuminating the reasons for making sure that learning is fun. Part of the attraction of our project was the opportunity to engage in “serious play” together. I will discuss this further in Chapter 6.

Levels or stages of reflection: Abstract vs. material

Another aspect of reflective practice well documented in teacher education is the theorizing of distinct levels or stages of progression in reflective thinking. Since Schön (1983) distinguished between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, there has been a general acceptance of the idea that there is a different quality to thinking “in the moment or as a reflective task looking back on professional practice” (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p. 411). The notion of levels or stages of reflection is widespread throughout the literature, though it is not uncontested. At the heart of this debate is the much-discussed connection between theory and practice (Beauchamp, 2006). Phenomenologist Max van Manen (1977) presented a dichotomous conception of the ‘theory-practice’ relation. He proposed reflection as a means of forging a link between ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘ways of being practical’: the practitioner needs to develop a perspective on practice based on a firm theoretical foundation and then to apply that informed perspective in practice. van Manen defined levels of reflectivity that represent a ‘narrow-to-broad’ pattern not uncommon in the literature: at the narrow end, reflection focuses on individual concerns, such as a desire to solve a purely personal problem or to re-think one’s recent decisions or actions, while at the other end reflection embraces the world outside the classroom, examining personal practice in relation to social, political, or

ethical issues. Sound theoretical knowledge is essential at all levels; however, differential value is placed on the levels. At the lowest level, reflection focuses on the narrowly practical “technical application of educational knowledge”; at the mid-level, reflection involves a broader, contextual analysis: “the process of analyzing and clarifying individual and cultural experiences, meanings, perceptions...and presuppositions”, and at the highest level: “a constant critique of domination, of institutions, and of repressive forms of authority” (van Manen, 1977, pp. 226-227).

The work of Donald Schön represents an opposing view. Examining reflection through the lens of professional practice, Schön (1995) contested this hierarchical assessment of reflection that values broad ethical, social, and moral educational issues as superior to reflection that attends to more immediate classroom concerns; he perceived it as representative of the dominant epistemological paradigm in which “systematic knowledge produced by schools of higher learning” is more highly valued than “intuitive artistry” or the “kinds of knowing already embedded in competent practice” (Schön, 1995, p.29). Although he argued that “the relationship between ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ schools, academic and practice knowledge, needs to be turned on its head” (p. 29), and that practice should be seen as a setting for knowledge generation rather than for instrumental application of knowledge, the notion of hierarchical levels of reflection has persisted, though not always as explicitly defined as van Manen’s.

Many subsequent studies have theorized *multiple* levels through which thinking proceeds sequentially or spirally or on a sliding continuum. For example, education researcher Barbara Larrivee (2000) uses the term *critical reflection* to describe “examination of personal and professional belief systems, as well as the deliberate consideration of the ethical implications and impact of practices” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294). She theorizes four levels which range along a continuum with instrumental/behavioural considerations at one end and meaning-focused/belief assessment at the other. Reflection “flows through” these levels from [1] fundamental core beliefs (*philosophical*), through [2] sets of principles derived from those beliefs (*framework*), through [3] interpreting those principles into a practical stance (*interpretive*), to [4] immediate thoughts and actions (*decision-making*). She models this process as concentric circles with *philosophical* reflection at the centre and *decision-making* at the outer ring. It is not

a linear process: “In actual practice, the critical reflection process is more cyclical than linear, more incremental than sequential” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 304).

Another pattern that recurs throughout the literature models reflection as ranging along an ‘inner’-to-‘outer’ continuum (Beauchamp, 2006). At the ‘inner’ level, reflection focuses on ideals and meaning-making, while at the outer levels reflection attends to action in the world. For example, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) proposed a model for “core reflection”, believing that a structured model is necessary for teaching new teachers how to reflect in a way that goes “deeper” than instrumental problem-solving. They are skeptical of van Manen’s notion of the teacher as “theory-guided decision maker” and draw attention to research that emphasizes the impact of unconscious, emotional, or “non-rational” influences on teachers’ decision-making. They offer instead a model that provides a “balanced focus on thinking, feeling, wanting and acting” (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 50). In this ‘onion’ model, levels of reflection are depicted as concentric circles with “mission” at the centre and ranging outward through “identity”, “beliefs”, “competencies”, to “behaviour”, with “environment” surrounding the entire circle. This model parallels Larrivee’s concentric model in that levels of thinking and believing are at the centre, and action is the visible, outward engagement with the world. Also like Larrivee’s, these levels are not treated hierarchically: “The idea behind the model is that the inner levels determine the way an individual functions on the outer levels, but that there is also a reverse influence (from outside to inside)” (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 53). However, the levels do represent a progression from abstract/thinking to concrete/doing, and the emphasis is on supporting teachers to “dig down” in their reflection in order to “make contact with the deeper levels inside” (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2005, p. 54). These two models represent a theoretical thread that is strong in the literature.

One further example offers a slight conceptual variation which is also widely accepted. The psychological orientation grounding Korthagen and Vasalos’s model—i.e., the references to “inner potential” and “core qualities”—is echoed in the work of Rodgers and Scott (2008) who see reflection as a necessary practice for pre-service teachers as they forge a ‘teacher identity’. Recognizing that many studies investigating teacher identity are conceptual while relatively few are empirical, they apply Robert Kegan’s (1982, 1994) constructive developmental psychology model to propose stages

of development in reflection, seeking to understand “what it takes to move from being ‘authored by’ to ‘authoring’ oneself, [which] is not ... addressed in detail in the literature” (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 737). They chart three different stages by comparing how a teacher makes sense of socio-politico-historical forces, his/her relationship with others, and the degree of authorship revealed in self-stories. These stages represent the “evolving self” which “moves from being defined by external sources toward being defined internally” (p. 742). At the lowest/earliest level, “the instrumental knower”, the teacher’s reflective capacity is limited, her/his self-awareness is undeveloped, and experiences are seen as concrete and external. The second level, “the socializing knower”, is defined by others’ opinions or expectations; reflection is dominated by convention. At the highest level, “the self-authoring knower” is deeply reflective, aware of his/her own values and how they fit or do not fit within the institutional forces that shape educational practice (pp. 740-741). The goal of this model is to enable teachers to develop their own voice and adopt a critical perspective on their teaching. It is predicated on an assumption of a singular ‘essential self’ that passes through developmental stages toward a higher state of actualization.

In all these cases, the levels or stages represent degrees of ‘depth’ of thinking, ranging from concrete, instrumental problem-solving or reporting events and facts toward more abstract processes such as “synthesizing experiences, integrating information and feedback, uncovering underlying reasons, and discovering new meaning” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 297), ideally leading to renewed integrity and ‘empowerment’. The point I want to emphasize is that the studies which theorize these models invariably place a higher value on analytical rather than instrumental ‘levels’ of reflection. Reflection that is concrete, immediate, and practical is deemed inferior to reflection that locates the teaching-self among social, political, cultural constructions, and there is an assumption that language, especially prose writing, is the most effective way to reach those ‘deeper’ levels of thinking and self-analysis. Once again, I see these approaches to reflection as representing an epistemological bias endemic to their academic setting: the valuing of abstract, rational analysis as the essential ground for decision-making and action (Gitlin, 2008; Kress, 2011), and the development of that capacity through meditative writing (Barton & Ryan, 2014; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2011). My contention is that much of this substantial body of literature does not address or accommodate the conditions of the teaching life. In our study group, we recognized that

classroom decision-making and actions did not always follow from careful rational thought; while we valued (and pursued) reflection that addressed issues of sociological or political import, it was clear to us that effective teaching demanded other kinds of thinking as well, such as multitasking, improvisation, and instant problem-solving. Rational reflective thought is not enough for classroom survival.

These common theoretical assumptions—the privileging of abstraction and analysis over concrete descriptions or narratives, and the notion of levels or progressive stages in reflection—do not go unchallenged in the literature, however. Several theorists call for more acknowledgement of the ways that working conditions and power structures differ between schools and universities, and they express caution about differentially evaluating levels or stages of reflection. Zeichner (1994), for example, following Schön's (1983) distinction between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, rejects a hierarchical ordering of reflective practices:

The idea of levels of reflection implies that technical reflection at the level of action must somehow be transcended so that teachers can enter the nirvana of critical reflection. This position devalues technical skill and the everyday world of teachers which is of necessity dominated by reflection at the level of action. (Zeichner, 1994, p. 14)

From another perspective, Fendler (2003) expresses a general skepticism regarding the largely-uncontested prominence given to reflective practice in teacher education. In particular, she argues that the “effects of power reverberate through current practice” (Fendler, 2003, p. 17) but are unquestioned or ignored. She rejects not only the hierarchical valuing of levels of reflection and the very notion of levels of reflection but she further questions the trust bestowed upon reflection as a tool for social reconstruction. “There is no guarantee that one kind of reflection will produce an insight that is any more authentic or emancipatory than any other kind of reflection” (Fendler, 2003, p. 21). She cites two reasons for dismissing the distinction between (or preference for) socially-conscious reflection over immediate problem-solving. One danger is assuming that instrumental or “technocratic” reflection is motivated by an uncritical perspective on the school system. This assumption ignores the possibility that teachers may focus on technical problem-solving in their teaching because “they believe that the efficient mastery of subject matter by their students is the most effective means

of redressing social inequities” (Fendler, 2003, p. 21). Further, she argues that so called ‘critical’ reflection may not be particularly critical. Rather it may represent “heedless” substitution of leftist ideological positions—eg. critical pedagogy—for more mainstream liberal democratic principles. For Fendler, several assumptions about reflective practice in teacher education need to be tempered with more critique and skepticism:

When teacher education research provides elaborate programs for teaching teachers to be reflective practitioners, the implicit assumption is that teachers are not reflective unless they practice the specific techniques promoted by researchers. It is ironic that the rhetoric about reflective practitioners focuses on empowering teachers, but the requirements of learning to be reflective are based on the assumption that teachers are incapable of reflection without direction from expert authorities.... If we do not maintain a skeptical and critical attitude about what we do, then we have little chance of discovering the ways our best intentions may be falling short of the mark. (Fendler, 2003, p. 23)

Fendler’s call for greater self-awareness on the part of teacher educators is echoed by education philosopher Audrey Thompson (2003) who points out an unconscious valorization of academic values in some educational theories. Her critique of developmental “identity stage theories” in anti-racist education applies equally to stage theories of reflection in teacher education. Such theories are highly problematic because the theorist who proposes the model projects him/herself as the highest stage.

Whatever their political or moral agenda, stage theories start from a definite ideal and work backwards. Usually, the definite ideal is the ideal embodied by the theorist who came up with the stage model in the first place. Piaget, Kohlberg, and Gilligan were not assuming some ideal beyond themselves; they did not consider themselves to be in the early or middle stages of the developmental models they were describing. Implicitly, they took themselves to represent the endpoints of development and then worked backwards to identify the previous stages as intermediate points on the way to becoming like them. (Thompson, 2003, pp. 19-20)

Thompson’s, Zeichner’s and Fendler’s comments highlight differences in the nature and conditions of work, of power, and of knowledge between schools and universities. University education programs, especially those with a professional orientation, share many concerns and goals with the teaching profession—but the campus and the public

school are very different “figured worlds” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 2001). “In fact, there is a long-standing debate among educators... about the degree to which the culture of practice found within schools and the culture of theory and research found within universities are mutually exclusive” (Mandzuk, 1997, p. 440). Chapter 6 will illustrate how negotiating this sociocultural and epistemological gap comprised a significant element in our group reflective practice.

‘Adapting the Recipe’: Interrogating academic reflective practice

I have highlighted several fundamental features of academic discourse which shape the teaching and assessing of reflection in university-based teacher education. These academic values and practices—the privileging of theory over practice, analysis over narrative, abstract over concrete, and the assumption of writing as the best medium for expression of complex thought—exerted a strong influence on our study group as we came together to reflect on our teaching. As graduate students and instructors, we were interested in thinking critically and theoretically about education. We readily accepted the perspective that the act of writing serves as a way of making meaning, “the formulation and bringing into being of ideas that were not there before being written, a method of coming to know” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2002, p. 406) and that writing “enables us to discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it” (Daykin, 2009, p.123). We had entered graduate programs because we wanted to have our horizons stretched and our perspectives enlarged. However, we were not able to accept without question some of these traditional academic literacies: the prime reasons group members gave for joining in the study were the opportunity to share stories from practice and to use forms of expression beyond conventional academic or reflective prose writing—activities which found little or no place in some of our university programs.

We all wanted to reflect on our teaching, and I think we all felt, as I did, that we *were* reflective teachers even though none of us had kept a journal except when required in a university course. Maintaining a consistent record of the sort of reflection that seemed so useful and satisfying at the university seemed not to fit so well in the noisy, dynamic, highly social and improvisational world of teaching. We struggled to reconcile a wish “to think, to discuss and read with the relentless realities of day-to-day life in schools” (Mandzak, 1997, p. 440). Our group reflective activities often focused on negotiating the gap which we all perceived between our teaching worlds and our

academic worlds. While we defined our collective practice *against* certain characteristics of academic discourse, our interests *aligned* us with theoretical work that questioned those conventions. To understand the development of our discursive practice, I have found it useful to draw on aspects of theoretical work in arts education, and multiliteracies/multimodal social semiotics.

At first glance these bodies of work might seem so disparate as to be incompatible; however, I find they share several strong threads in common, and I also find their differences to be complementary rather than antipodal. I will briefly outline the general focus of these theoretical perspectives and then highlight the commonalities and differences that provided a framework for my study.

2.3. Arts Education: Benefits of learning in and through the arts

Arts education literature comprises a conjunction of multiple voices arguing for the inclusion of the arts as not only valid but *necessary* curricula in public education. From many viewpoints, philosophies, and research orientations this literature extols the benefits of including the arts in the education of young people—a spectrum of claims which endures virtually uncontested. Among these writings are debates regarding how best to educate in or through the arts (Bresler, 2004; Bresler, 2007; Dickson, 2011; Smith, 1995), whether or not involved teachers must themselves be artists (Wright, 1975), what or whose art forms and practices are appropriate to include in classrooms (Clark, Day & Greer, 1991; Eisner, 2002; Elfland, 2007; Gude, 2007; Ling, 1999), how best to conduct assessment in arts education (Murphy & Espeland, 2007; Taylor, 2006), and whether or not participating in arts education improves academic performance (Eisner, 2002; Russell & Zembylas, 2007). No one, however, seems to be arguing that involvement in the arts is detrimental to the education of youth. The one dissenting voice—querying whether time spent on the arts might reduce test scores in academic subjects—has been silenced: “Studies abound that seek to quell anxieties about the abilities of students who have experienced arts-integrated curricula to achieve test success in core school subjects. Quantitative studies show repeatedly that students’ grades do not suffer, and may even improve” (Russell & Zembylas, 2007, p. 296). The

defence of aesthetic education is prompted, therefore, not by theoretical challenge but by pragmatic concerns: in public schooling in BC, the status of arts education is precarious while the so-called 'academic' curricula are privileged. For example, academic courses are required for graduation credentials or post-secondary entrance whereas arts courses are 'elective'; excellent academic performance is rewarded with widespread recognition and large scholarships, and students who excel in academic course work are considered 'the smartest' within school cultures. When school districts are faced with (seemingly perennial) budget shortfalls, arts programs are often the first to be sacrificed. The literature may therefore predominantly be characterized as a voice for advocacy.

Our study group members were all teaching in or through the arts and were committed to defending arts programs and curricula; we were familiar with the educational benefits claimed in arts education literature, and we wanted to explore those benefits in our reflective practice. In order to uncover the foundation of understandings, beliefs, and values on which we were developing our reflective practice, I will give a brief overview of the predominant claims that characterize arts education scholarship.

Before doing so, however—recognizing that arts education literature includes a number of terms that are open to multiple interpretations—I wish to clarify my own use of several terms in relation to my study.

The arts: I use this to refer to the range of languages of expression—with their attendant practices, genres, and communities—widely understood as 'the arts' within Western societies, including but not limited to: visual arts, dance, music, drama, creative writing, or multimedia creations. There are many possible genres, forms, and activities that fall under these general categories.

Arts education: By this I mean formal exposure to skills, knowledge, beliefs, history, codes, traditions and standards as a process of initiation into the community of practice of one or more of the arts.

Aesthetic: I use 'aesthetic' strictly as an adjective to designate practices, objects, and performances connected to activities that are included under the broad umbrella of 'the arts' in Western societies. In the same strict sense, I use 'aesthetic

education' interchangeably with 'arts education'. The plural form 'aesthetics' refers to the branch of philosophy that studies principles of art and/or beauty.

2.3.1. Benefits of aesthetic education

The benefits of arts education are most strongly represented in the literature as contributions toward *individual self-realization*, and these are the claims that are most relevant to our group's reflective practice; however, it is important to note that the literature asserts many positive societal outcomes for arts education as well (Bresler, 2007), all of which comprise the context of our collaboration. One such claim, for example, asserts that participation in the arts develops reflective thinking and social and affective skills that result in a more sophisticated, more productive work force (Psilos, 2002; Fowler, 2006). Further, studies in the arts contribute to clearly defined national, ethnic, community identities and "make vibrant" the cultural life of societies (Elfland, 2007). "[The arts] help us to define ourselves and our times, as well as other people and other times" (Fowler, 2006, p. 7). And the arts can provide empowerment for marginalized individuals or communities, giving a voice to those who are often silenced (Weinstein, 2010). Ultimately, art can serve as a form of protest, a means of addressing social injustices; therefore, arts education can lead to social change (Greene, 1995; Eisner, 2002). Arts can inspire social action by helping us "to become aware of the ways in which certain dominant social practices enclose us in molds, define us in accord with extrinsic demands, discourage us from going beyond ourselves and from acting on possibility" (Greene, 1995, p. 135). These claims notwithstanding, a focus on individual growth runs strongly throughout the literature. Even claims of societal benefits depend on the notion that arts education has the potential to improve society because it improves individual persons.

The individual, self-realizing benefits of arts education are often expressed as growth in different facets of the human person—cognitive, emotional, physical, social, or spiritual. Of these, the most thoroughly investigated and vigorously argued benefit is enhanced cognitive development. In *Arts and the Creation of Mind* (2002) Elliot Eisner mounted a compelling and often-cited case for placing the arts at the centre of school curricula rather than on the margins. The arts, he argued, provide avenues through which we can expand our repertoire of ways to make meaning and open up

opportunities for cognitive development that are difficult (or impossible) to provide through other disciplines. Creating and expressing in media other than language allows students to express what language cannot convey—even in metaphorical usage (Eisner, 2002). Further, the medium through which we represent our ideas shapes not only what we can express but what we can actually perceive:

The medium we choose to use and the particular form of representation we select—say, sound rather than a visual form—affect our perception of the world. If we are to represent something through a medium, we try to find qualities of experience or features of the world that will lend themselves to the medium we have selected. Thus, representation influences not only what we intend to express, but also what we are able to see in the first place. (Eisner, 2002, p.23)

At its best, arts education is transformative—the engagement of the imagination in meaning-making and interpretation leads to “re-creation” of the individual (Eisner, 2002). Eisner here builds on the highly influential work of Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), which argued that exercising the imagination through arts education raises awareness and perceptiveness, prompting critical thinking, questioning and transformation. For Greene, cognitive development is at the heart of the transformation made possible through arts education: “The ends in view are multiple, but they surely include the stimulation of imagination and perception, a sensitivity to various modes of seeing and sense making, and a grounding in the situations of lived life” (Greene, 1995, p. 138). A robust body of empirical and philosophical literature illustrates and reinforces the claims of Eisner and Greene.

Throughout the literature other developmental benefits—beyond the intellectual—are linked to participation in the arts. For example, improved manual dexterity and heightened sensory awareness are associated with sustained study in any of the arts. The notion of embodiment is no stranger to arts educators; motor skills and mindfulness are intentionally developed as crucial in all arts practice, and the involvement of the body in both appreciation and performance is taken for granted. Particular to the kinaesthetic arts, such as dance or acting, are improvements in coordination, strength, flexibility, stamina, precision of movement, and proprioception (Eisner, 2002; Bresler, 2004; Shapiro, 2008; Shusterman, 2012). Claims in the emotional domain include growth through exploring and articulating one’s emotions, the

development of empathy (Eisner, 2002), learning to express emotion in socially acceptable ways (Jensen, 2002), and connecting affectively to challenging social topics or truths such as racism, mental health, or suicide (Russell & Zembylas, 2007). Further claims are reported in the area of social skills such as building or connecting to communities, respect for one's own and others' cultural heritages, collaboration, and responsibility. "To the extent that the arts teach empathy, they develop our capacity for compassion and humaneness...The arts teach respect" (Fowler, 2006, p. 8). Learning a craft promotes the development of abilities such as attention to detail, planning, problem solving, independent self-assessment, self-discipline, refining/polishing, patience, persistence, imagination, and creativity (Dissanayake, 2003; Eisner, 2002; Fowler, 2006). "The arts require students to apply standards to their own work, to be self-critical, and to be able to self-correct. Through the arts, students learn self-discipline and how to handle frustration and failure in pursuit of their goals" (Fowler, 2006, p. 6). Eric Jensen points out the qualities of Waldorf School graduates¹ noted by their college professors: "humility, sense of wonder, concentration, intellectual resourcefulness" (Jensen, 2002, p. 53). And finally, arts education is credited with the potential to inspire personal (and, by extension, social) transformation (Gradle, 2014).

Both Maxine Greene and Richard Shusterman discuss the capacity of the arts to contribute to an "awakened" life. Shusterman (2012), claims that living "artfully", in a fully embodied way, can break bad habits that limit our perception of and enjoyment of the richness of lived experience: "We fail to see things as they really are with the rich, sensuous resplendence of their full being because we see them through eyes heavy with conventional habits of viewing them and blinded by stereotypes of meaning" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 291). Similarly, Maxine Greene believes "the shocks of awareness to which the arts give rise leave us (should leave us) less immersed in the everyday and more impelled to wonder and to question" (Greene, 1995, p.135); arts education can and should inspire students to imagine other possibilities and ways of being.

¹ Waldorf Schools form an international network of independent schools whose curricula give prominence to imagination, creativity, and artistic expression.

At this point, it may begin to appear that while there is abundant research supporting the inclusion of the arts in education, the widespread incidence in this literature of presenting the claimed benefits in segregated terms of intellectual, physical, social growth is problematic. I question the assumption that it is possible to compartmentalize human qualities, activities, or learning in this way. However, I recognize that this view of human nature is widely accepted as common sense and undoubtedly holds sway in public arenas in which benefits of arts education need to be convincingly represented. Research advocating inclusion of the arts in education is often addressed not only to other academics but to administrators of educational institutions—provincial Ministries, school boards, superintendents—or to teachers and parents. In these public spheres, proposals for educational improvement are required to be ‘evidence-based’, unambiguous, measurable, and preferably immediately observable. It is therefore understandable that much of the research describing benefits—which are often open to interpretation, impossible to quantify, and slow to mature—is presented to fit a rhetorical purpose. I do not, however, believe it is possible to isolate physical, intellectual, emotional and social experience, and I find a more apt perspective in those strands of inquiry that reinforce the claims of the benefits of aesthetic participation from a more holistic view of human life. The idea of embodied knowing is one such strand in the literature, characterized by a resistance to the “valorization of rationality” (Gitlin, 2008) and to the separation of mind and body in education:

In Eurocentric cultures, a somatic basis to knowledge generation has occupied a lower order position within the hierarchy of what constitutes valid and reliable knowledge. Indeed somatic engagement as a resource for developing learning... has long been derided as irrelevant in the quest to make sense of our experiences.... Rationality, reason and objectivity have triumphed to the detriment of the subjective, sensing and emotive body. (Smears, 2009, pp. 100-101).

Within the lively and substantial mass of embodiment literature, I found a helpful perspective in Richard Shusterman’s (2006, 2012) concept of ‘somaesthetics’—his project of extending traditional analytical aesthetics to embrace aspects of pragmatism, grounding the process in the mindful body. He provided a conceptualization of embodied humanity that to my mind was unified, coherent, and convincing. His concept helped me to clarify and situate our study group’s convictions regarding the place of the body in reflective practice.

2.3.2. Somaesthetics: the holistic/desegregated person

Shusterman describes somaesthetics as “a field of study aimed at enriching our lives by providing richer and more rewarding aesthetic experience” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 304), a discipline that acknowledges the body as the ground of all human activity, including rational thought. He replaces the word ‘body’ and all its distracting connotations with *soma*, the integrated “sentient lived body rather than merely a physical body” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 5).

We think and feel with our bodies, especially with the body parts that constitute the brain and nervous system. Our bodies are likewise affected by mental life, as when certain thoughts bring a blush to the cheek and change our heart rate and breathing rhythms. The body-mind connection is so pervasively intimate that it seems misleading to speak of body and mind as two different, independent entities. The term “body-mind” would more aptly express their essential union. (Shusterman, 2012, p. 27)

Convinced that sociopolitical influences are deeply implicated in art and aesthetics, that the arts and aesthetic considerations are and should be integrated into daily life, and that such an integration contributes to a richer, more fully human life, Shusterman wove together perspectives from analytic aesthetics, philosophical pragmatism, critical theory, poststructuralism and hermeneutics. He realized that to integrate an aesthetic philosophy with daily social, cultural, and political life meant “elaborating the ways that a disciplined, ramified, and interdisciplinary attention to bodily experience, methods, discourses, and performances could enrich our aesthetic experience and practice, not only in the fine arts but in the diverse arts of living” (Shusterman, p. 140). Acknowledging embodiment as “an increasingly trendy theme in academia”, he clarified three ways that somaesthetics differs from other embodiment philosophies. First, he recognizes the influence of culture and subject position on embodied consciousness: the integrated body-mind or *soma* is not—as described by some philosophers, particularly phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty—a single, universal consciousness common to all. Second, somaesthetics goes beyond the traditional analytic-philosophical aim of analyzing or describing aesthetic consciousness by intentionally working to improve it. Third, not content with “mere philosophical discourse”, somaesthetics entails actual practical exercises in somatic training. Through mindfulness practices that cultivate

bodily awareness we can enhance our wellbeing and extend our perceptive capacities to live a more healthy, integrated and aesthetically rich life.

How can we appreciate even the pleasures of thought without recognizing their somatic dimensions—the pulsing of energy, flutters of excitement, and rush of blood that accompany our impassioned flights of contemplation? Knowledge, moreover, is sturdier when incorporated into the muscle memory of skilled habit and deeply embodied experience. As human thought would not make sense without the embodiment that places the sensing, thinking subject in the world and thereby gives her thought perspective and direction, so wisdom and virtue would be empty without the diverse, full-bodied experience on which they draw and through which they manifest themselves in exemplary embodied speech, deeds, and radiating presence. (Shusterman, 2012, p. 46)

Shusterman's holistic view of the 'soma', his understanding of sociocultural influences on the integrated mind-body, his appreciation of the embodied nature of aesthetic creation and response, and his project of weaving these stances into a way of living have provided a theoretical lens that helped me to interpret our study group's conversations and priorities.

Arts education literature and somaesthetics have been fundamental to the inception and development of my study. As teachers interested in arts, we had experienced for ourselves and had witnessed in our students the ways that embodied explorations such as art, dance, or drama could open the door to valuable insights. We had been frustrated by the exclusionary focus on rationality in our own academic studies as well as in our pedagogical experiences with public school learning and curricula, and we felt strongly that education at all levels needed to include “more intuitive or holistic ways of knowing” (Gitlin, 2008, p. 632). Further, the precariousness of arts programs in public education was an issue familiar to all members of our study group, and we came together with a shared passion for defending or developing aesthetic programs in our own educational settings. Scholarly enumeration of benefits of arts participation had reinforced our assessments of our own aesthetic experiences and our observations of the power of the arts in our classrooms. We did not need convincing of the pleasure of creating nor of the validity of the arts as “a way of knowing” which “opens new modalities for us in the lived world” (Greene, 1995, p. 149): we came together seeking those benefits in our professional reflective practice.

2.4. Multiliteracies theorizing: A context for multimodal social semiotics

Multimodal education theorizing also provided a significant pillar in the theoretical framework of this study. As a specific branch of multiliteracies theories, multimodal education is one among several diverse perspectives and research interests concerned with aspects of communication in contemporary social conditions. Studies in multiliteracies (ML) investigate and theorize varied aspects of communication, such as socially distinct variants and uses of a single language; communicative strategies of speakers of more than one language; constellations of linguistic and cultural behaviours, gestures and strategies that constitute a social domain; or the multiplicity of communicative modes employed within and across languages and cultures (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Gee, 2000; Gee, 2004; Jewitt, 2008; Kress, 2011; Mills, 2009; Mills, 2010; Pennycook, 2007; Street, 2003). These scholarly interests share a political and pedagogical investment in economic, political, and technological influences on daily lives in the era of globalization.

ML theory begins with an account of the socioeconomic conditions of post-modernity and then analyzes the effects of these changes on education. Globalization or “postFordism” (Piore & Sable, 1984) or “fast capitalism” (Gee, 1994) is characterized by the world-wide rise of liberal, free-market logic and the progressive deregulation and privatization of public institutions. This literature analyzes the societal effects as markets expand and contract, noting how commodities, populations, languages, and identities flow across national borders creating unprecedented diversity and increasing urbanization within populations (Luke, 2011). It describes the result of these ‘flows’ as two-pronged: on the one hand, a kind of cultural homogenization in which certain goods, languages, values and practices migrate and become rooted in otherwise widely divergent geographical locations and cultures, while on the other hand simultaneously sparking a resistant assertion of cultural difference.

The more the world becomes interconnected by the global cultural web of communication and information technologies and integrated into a single accessible market, the more significant these differences become. For every moment of the global convergence of cultures and peoples, there is another moment of divergence. (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 231).

A strong theoretical thread attends to global effects of the rapid expansion of digital electronic communications, describing the ways that digital media create online communities and 'markets' around an infinite number of issues, concerns, preferences, and affiliations—digital communities that no longer need to conform to the limits of space or time (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Jewitt, 2008; Lam, 2006; Lotherington, 2011; Mills, 2010). ML theory pays particular attention to another effect of this global change: the fragmentation or extinction of languages (Pennycook, 2007). As people relocate outside their original geo-linguistic areas, the threat of language loss is profound. Many studies note the exponential rate of language extinction in the twenty-first century; "it has been estimated that approximately one half of the 6,000 languages spoken in the world today are going to disappear in the course of the 21st century" (Cerny, 2010, p. 53). Even English, as it becomes the dominant language of commerce and on-line communication, is transformed and multiplied: "English itself becomes fragmented into hybrid and unstable forms that are less and less mutually intelligible" (Kalantzis & Cope, 2000, p. 144). This literature raises questions about the definition of 'literacy' in the era of "other Englishes" (Pennycook, 2007) and commonplace multilingualism.

The relevance of these global developments to education, generally, and to concepts and practices of 'literacy', more specifically, is the unifying background for the diverse perspectives within ML theory. The central thrust of this work is rethinking the established definitions of literacy and the values that sustain it: "The world of our recent modern past, dominated as it was by a word-centred rationality both straightforward and descriptive with stable signs fixed to stable signifiers, is fast disappearing" (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000, p. 223), and education systems need to respond. ML theory questions the traditional positivist privileging of rationality over other forms of knowing, coinciding as it does with assumptions that anything worth expressing can be expressed in words and that writing is a neutral and superior medium (Kress 2011). Under classroom conditions of tremendous linguistic, technological, and cultural diversity, the conventional institutional construction of literacy as the ability to read and write in Standard English is too monolithic and static (Barton, Hamilton & Ivanic, 2000; Carrington & Luke, 1997). "Against this changing communicational landscape, which can be typified by diversity and plurality, the dominant view of literacy as a universal, autonomous, and monolithic entity is at best dated and in need of reconsideration" (Jewitt, 2008, p. 244). Defining 'literacy' as proficiency in reading and writing in a standardized form of English

(Rosenberg, 2010) creates conditions of inequality: children do not arrive at school with equal access to Euro-American communication preferences. Students whose home environments prepare them for reading and writing, facility with numbers and patterns, linear reporting of facts, and sitting still will find school a more comfortable and successful experience than students who bring different sets of values and competencies (Lotherington, 2011; Stein, 2008). “Literacy viewed in this way...is not considered a social process inclusive of cultural diversity. Students are compared against measuring sticks, yielding a one-size-fits-all curriculum devoid of social and cultural processes that impact learning and literacy” (Hagood, 2000, p. 321). Although individual teachers may support and encourage their students’ facilities in other modes or other linguistic competencies, in the systemic distribution of awards and ‘success’ such competencies are not valued—are in fact seen as deficits to be corrected (Lo Bianco, 2000). ML theory advocates that educators need to recognize the diverse linguistic and digital literacies that students bring into the classroom and the ways they use these literacies to negotiate their educational pathways and school identities; teachers need to integrate students’ experiences, interests, skills, and knowledge into their formal learning. As a pedagogy, ML theory seeks to reduce the imposition of only selected literacies in students’ meaning-making. “The concern of multiple literacies is with the promotion of a pluralized notion of literacy and forms of representation and communication to help students negotiate a broader range of text types and modes of persuasion” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 255). In the globalized world, equity in education demands a wider range of options for making and representing meaning. For our study group, the concept of multiple literacies meshed with our understanding of the arts as ‘languages of expression’, and advocacy for “a broader range of text types” or “forms of representation”—both for our students and for ourselves—became a dominant theme in our collaboration.

2.4.1. Multimodal social semiotics

Under the umbrella of ML analysis, multimodal social semiotics (MSS) (Kress, 2011) describes and analyzes various communicative modes used in interaction and representation and investigates how those modes are valued, employed and assessed in various education settings. Regarding language as only one of many modes of human communication and representation—none of which may claim to be neutral (Jewitt,

2008; Kress, 2011), MSS adapts principles of linguistic analysis to examine all possible material resources and social practices we draw on to make meaning and to communicate (Jewitt, 2013). A *mode* is a socially recognized set of semiotic resources for making meaning, including gesture, image, sound, speech, music, writing, and combinations of these resources. MSS attends to the distinctive affordances and constraints of various modes for making meaning, to the ways that social context influences what semiotic resources are available, and to the importance of the interest and agency of the sign-maker in that context.

From a MSS perspective, knowledge does not exist until it is made material through some form of representation; learning, therefore, is seen as a process of design or semiotic sign-making on the part of a learner who utilizes whatever modes and materials are available and seem most apt for the task of making meaning.

The theoretical and descriptive tools of social semiotics provide the means to see *sign-* and *meaning-making* as *learning*; and they allow *learning* to be seen as an instance of *sign-* and *meaning-making*. Multimodality provides the tools for the recognition of all the modes through which meaning has been made and learning has taken place... To make a sign is to *make* knowledge. *Knowledge* is shaped in the use, by a social agent, of distinct representational affordances of specific modes at the point of making of the sign. ... Making signs, meaning, and knowledge all change the “inner” resources of the sign- and meaning-maker; in that process identity is constantly remade. (Kress, 2011, pp. 209- 211; original italics)

This pedagogical perspective shifts the emphasis away from a more traditional focus on assessment of sign-*use* to a much greater emphasis on the interpretive work of the learner as sign-maker (Archer, 2010; Jewitt, 2008, 2013; Kress, 2011). “Multimodality foregrounds the modal choices people make and the social effect of these choices on meaning....The context shapes the resources available for meaning making and how these are selected and designed” (Jewitt, 2013, p. 6). In this way, a sign may be taken as a “window onto its maker”, and assessment of learning becomes a process of analyzing the choices made and the principles applied in the composition of the sign as well as what is revealed about the learner’s engagement with the prompt that led to its creation. A multimodal social semiotic vision of learning

...moves the focus away, decisively, from the metaphor of *acquisition*, away from 'metrics of achievement', based on the power of an institution, and toward a hypothesis about the *principles* of interpretation/transformation that had been brought to bear in the sign-maker/learner's interpretation. ... Attending to the learner's principles is neither a question of 'anything goes' nor one of 'bend your understanding to the power of an institution'. Rather, it allows a teacher to use the learner's principles to lead her or him to the meanings of the culture: not via imposed power but via the road of the learner's principles. (Kress, 2011, p. 216)

Moving beyond the logocentrism and the "sole focus on the mind" (Gitlin, 2008, p. 269) of Western positivist-oriented pedagogies, multimodal social semiotic theory acknowledges the role of the body in communication and learning. "The materiality of modes connects with the body and its senses that in turn place the physical and sensory at the heart of meaning" (Jewitt, 2013, p.10). MSS promotes pedagogy that opens up a wider array of options for meaning making and engagement with the world (Kress, 2000a, 2000b, Jewitt, 2008, 2013). Language is acknowledged as embodied and as integrated with other social and semiotic practices (Pennycook, 2007). MSS also includes within its purview the semiotic resources and affordances of bodily modes in digital multimodal communication as well as in intercultural communication. The body cannot be distilled out of any mode of representation. Sign making in any mode is a realization of learning, of meaning making, of knowledge, and having many modal resources available enables a more apt selection on the part of the sign maker, thereby potentially deepening the learning.

The emphasis on the learner as interpreter and maker is fundamental to MSS and was crucial to my study. Viewing learning as a manifestation of the learner's engagement with the topic and materials at hand, accepting all sign-making (in many modes) as expressions of knowledge, and assessing learning by analyzing the selections the learner makes regarding content and modes...these principles reflect an epistemological alternative to traditional academic concepts of rigour and literacy. Countering the dominant vision of a learner as deficit, as lacking particular knowledge or skills, the recognition of a learner as coming to the learning task already equipped with agency, interests, experiences, knowledges, and skills that contribute to the process of meaning-making was a view of education that resonated with our research group. Not only was this a pedagogy we were trying to embrace in our work, but it seemed to offer

what we felt was missing in our experiences as graduate students. MSS theory and pedagogy acknowledged the possibility of learning in multiple modes in higher education as well as in schools. One such study (Barton & Ryan, 2014) described an Australian research project that developed a framework for teaching and assessing reflective practice in pre-professional programs in fashion, music, and dance. Acknowledging that “some knowledge must be expressed in non-discursive forms”, Barton and Ryan observed that effective reflection occurred in a mode appropriate to the practice in which the learner was engaged. Each professional program was responsible for teaching, assessing, and socializing participants into the professional domain. Barton and Ryan noted that “the discursive and/or performative elements of multi-modes enable the development of new meanings in such a context” (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p. 413). In these settings, reflecting and creating knowledge in modes that were congruent to the professional discipline facilitated the student’s shift from novice toward expert. This study provided explicit support for the notion that effective reflection need not be confined to written prose: “Whether discursive (written or oral) or performative (visual, spatial or embodied), the practice of reflection can be wide and varied” (Barton & Ryan, 2014, p. 422). As teachers, we looked to the academy to see what research and theory could contribute to a broader or deeper understanding of our work—we wanted to integrate new perspectives and ideas into our experiential knowledge with the goal of improving or transforming our practice. However, the sense of learning as ‘acquisition to fill a deficit’ was a dominant theme in our academic experiences, and invitations to integrate non-academic forms of expression or ways of knowing were the exception—becoming increasingly rare as we moved up the academic ladder. As I hope will become apparent in Chapter 6, it seemed that Kress’s (2011) description of “distorted” educational approaches were still very influential in our own academic experiences:

With hindsight it can be seen that past accounts that construed learning as *acquisition* were skewed views of human semiosis: both distorted *and* sustained through the exercise of power, in schools as elsewhere. That led to a constant damaging mis-recognition of the semiotic work of those who—knowingly or not—exercised their right to interpretation/transformation in ways that were neither legitimated nor recognized; that were ‘out of tune’ with power and hence ‘invisible’. Those who did ‘interpret’/‘transform’ too far from permissible limits failed to ‘achieve’, in terms of assessments based on metrics of conformity rather than in terms of principles for the recognition of semiotic, transformative, interpretive work. (Kress, 2011, p. 215)

2.5. Summary: Synthesizing literatures

At this point I would like to tie the rather disparate theoretical voices of arts education and multimodal social semiotics together. Although these two literatures are both rich in diverse perspectives, and although they represent divergent scholarly orientations, they nevertheless coincide on certain points that provided a useful set of lenses for analyzing the experiences of our research group. First, both theoretical viewpoints critique the traditional educational reliance on language as the dominant medium of meaning-making and argue for the validity of employing multiple modes or forms of expression in learning: all modes of expression give only a partial window on the world, and the choice of mode or form limits what can be seen. Also, acknowledging that 'rigorous' rationality is important but is not the only way of knowing the world, both viewpoints recognize that there are multiple ways of knowing, each with its own appropriate rigour. Finally, both orientations see the learner as a designer, and both acknowledge the educational power of inviting students to integrate extra-curricular ideas, literacies and identities into curricular work.

There are, however, two key differences between these two literatures, differences that complemented each other in providing a framework for this study. Primarily, they differ in fundamental orientation: aesthetic education emphasizes the importance of participation in the arts in terms of individual self-actualization. The joy of creating and appreciating aesthetic expressions is described as a natural and holistic process of developing inner potential. While there certainly are critically-minded arts education researchers and artists whose focus is on addressing issues of social justice through art, the dominant thrust of this literature is that social change results from individual transformation through the pleasure and 'awakening' power of artistic participation. Multimodal social semiotics, on the other hand, arises from a broad sociocultural view of global conditions, recognizing the sociopolitical effects of a narrow definition of literacy that links educational practices and policies with social inequities and identities. Multiliteracies theory and multimodal social semiotics regard the benefits of educating through multiple modes as an expansion of identities rather than the growth or development of capacities within the self.

In either of these two bodies of theory it is rare to find research that integrates both points of view. That is, however, what I have aimed to do in this study. There is rather a long distance to traverse in order to cross the border from one territory to the other, but it is a journey worth making: it yields the discovery that the border is more porous than one might expect and the possibility of dual citizenship is not beyond reach. I would like to mention two examples. In one, Vivian Gadsden (2008) used “a social-cultural-contextual framework” to examine key questions, trends and gaps in research on the arts in education. Through lenses of research, pedagogy, and theory (both epistemological and discursive), she identified, outlined, and compared themes across a range of arts education discourses. She examined and related perspectives from arts education, literacy studies, psychology, epistemology, and theories of learning. This unusually comprehensive survey of perspectives yields a conclusion that manages to harmonize them all:

It is not too dramatic to suggest that not offering students the opportunity to experience a broad array of thinking, social, and emotional dispositions through art—to reorder their habits of mind—is to deny them the full experience of learning and deny teachers the full opportunity to understand the breadth of possible knowledge. (Gadsden, 2008, p. 33)

In a second example, Susan Weinstein (2010) investigated the social outcomes of a group of teenagers participating in a Spoken Word Poetry program. The participants were “young people who by traditional measures are positioned as at risk” (Weinstein, 2010, p.3). To analyze these teens’ experiences Weinstein draws on sociolinguist James Gee’s (1996) concept of Discourses:

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language and other symbolic expressions, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and acting, as well as using various tools, technologies, or props that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’. (Gee, 1996, p. 161).

Weinstein observes the teen poets “develop literate identities; that is, they begin to see themselves as writers and to act on that self-perception” (Weinstein, 2010, p. 2). The poetry program is a Discourse that the young poets wish to enter, so they take up customs of dress, speech, action, and performance that conform to those who are already members. As their participation increases, “their self-confidence and their sense

of self-efficacy, of belonging, and of purpose are enhanced” (Weinstein, 2010, p. 2). Poetry programs such as Youth Spoken Word view participants in terms of their abilities rather than their assumed socioeconomic disadvantages, thus providing an example of “the potential of arts programming to reframe the rhetoric and provide effective strategies for action” (Weinstein, 2010, p. 3). Here again, applying a sociolinguistic lens to arts education is methodologically and theoretically coherent. I find discussions of power and identity within the broad sociocultural perspective of multiliteracies theory and multimodal social semiotics to be compelling—and not fully addressed in arts education writing. However, I find the recognition of personal empowerment and joy that comes from aesthetic participation to be missing in multiliteracies discourse. I see a place for both perspectives in education research, including (or especially) in teacher education, and I have found them both useful in analyzing our study group’s reflective practice.

One final comment remains to fully define the theoretical stance of this study. Throughout this document I have used the adjectives ‘multimodal’ and ‘aesthetic/artistic’ interchangeably to refer to the creative work our study group produced. I am aware that from certain theoretical perspectives these terms are not equivalent, and I would like to clarify my position in the context of this study. While I have never encountered a debate in the literature comparing the meanings or uses of these terms, I am confident that for some philosophers, arts-based researchers, and arts educators ‘artistic’ or ‘aesthetic’ carries connotations that are not encompassed by ‘multimodal’: i.e., in Western culture some created objects are given special status as art, distinguishing them from other created objects which may be considered ‘not art’ or possibly ‘craft’. A photograph, for example, may have a communicative intention which qualifies it as a semiotic sign, but it may not meet the viewer’s (or the photographer’s) aesthetic criteria for a piece of art. From this theoretical perspective, all ‘art works’ could be considered multimodal semiotic creations, but not all multimodal products are art. Libraries are filled with contributions to the philosophical/aesthetic debate over the definition of ‘art’ and its distinction from other creative work. I do not propose to enter that debate. In describing our study group’s reflective pieces as ‘artistic work’, I am not necessarily claiming they are works of art. Rather, I am referring to our engagement in artistic *processes* such as writing poetry, creating movement pieces, or taking photographs. Our focus was consistently on the act of expressing ourselves by creating something personal and unique, on the enjoyment of that process and its potential to contribute to expanded perspectives and

further creative work or conversations. I could have saved myself the trouble of writing these two paragraphs had I chosen strictly to refer to our work as multimodal; however, the concept of engaging in artistic processes was very important to the group members and to their identities. We used processes that belong to the world of art, we labelled those processes as 'artistic' and sometimes we referred to ourselves as 'artists'; however, we side-stepped completely (as irrelevant) the question of whether or not what we created was art.

Speaking entirely for myself, the process of creating in *any* mode felt very much the same whether I was writing a poem, writing this dissertation, or making a hearty soup for our next meeting: in each case I felt I was part of a discourse that had principles and expectations that I wanted to honour and fulfil. I was deeply absorbed in synthesizing elements of a chosen medium to bring to life something that was in my mind, something special that had never existed before. I have felt the same degree of absorption and 'creative flow' when doing other activities that are usually considered to be 'craft' or non-art such as arranging flowers or making a digital slide presentation; for this reason I am drawn to ethologist Ellen Dissanayake's (1992) theory of art as an innately human drive to "make some things special":

My theory recognizes that art, or, more accurately, the desire to make some things special, is a biologically endowed need. The impetus to mark as 'special' an expression or artifact, even our bodies, is deep-seated and widespread. Quite naturally, we exaggerate, pattern, and otherwise alter our movements or voices or words to indicate that what we are doing is set apart from ordinary movement, intonation, and speech.
(Dissanayake, 1992, p. 31)

Examining the existence of 'art' through the lens of evolutionary biology, she is skeptical regarding the peculiarly Western (and relatively recent) conception of art as something that stands outside normal human activity—"a superordinate abstract category, Art, to which belong *some* paintings, drawings, or carvings and not other paintings, drawings, or carvings" (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 14), seeing it as "dependent on and intertwined with ideas of commerce, commodity, ownership, history, progress, specialization, and individuality" (Dissanayake, 2003, p. 14). Dissanayake focuses not on the product but on the generative activity—"a behavior of art"—and this perspective

aligns with the priorities in our study group and also with multimodal social semiotic theory:

More essential than the result (the 'work of art', which can be striking or dull, achieved or abandoned) is the behavior or the activity, and more interesting, for our purposes, is the impetus that animates the behavior or activity.

If the essential behavioural core is making special, a concern about whether one or another example of it is or is not 'art' becomes irrelevant. (Dissanayake, 2003, pp. 30-31).

This perspective serves, I hope, to justify the stance I have taken in this paper regarding the interchangeable use of the terms artistic and multimodal in relation to our group's creative texts.

Having established the main theoretical influences that shaped and supported my study, I will now move to a discussion of my methodological beliefs and my processes of analysis and interpretation.

Chapter 3.

A credo for research

To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity, and trust. It is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.

(H. D. Thoreau quoted in Atkinson, 2000, p. 140)

Social science discourses, knowledges, and ways of being that are caring, insightful, and that value our collective connections to each other (including all forms of life and ‘nonlife’), while fostering our diversities in ways that challenge commodification, may be the most needed contemporary emotional and intellectual acts.

(Canella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 54)

3.1. Introduction

To begin a study, especially in the context of a PhD dissertation, required me to ask myself not only *What kind of research do I want to do?* but also *What kind of researcher do I want to be?* At first glance these seem to be two versions of the same question—but they really are not. Choosing what kind of research to do can, in some instances, be a question of technique or strategy: what approach is best fitted to my research question and will yield the most useful results? For me, that sort of technical question about method had to wait until I had addressed the second question. In approaching this project I wanted to “look beyond technician reductionism from the perspective of ‘knowing how to’ toward a ‘being someone who’ perspective” (Kelchtermans & Hamilton, 2004, p. 785). Figuring out what kind of researcher I wanted to be necessitated articulating a methodology, not just a method—before I could develop a suitable and effective way of working with my collaborators, I needed to try to define

my researcher identity ontologically and epistemologically. In this chapter I will attempt to give an account of this rather meandering process and its results.

Several enduring research issues provided the main signposts on my wanderings through the methodological landscape. I was troubled and intrigued by questions such as *How do I understand the reality I am investigating? What is my relationship to it? By what warrant can I claim to know something? What influences what counts as knowledge? How do I deal with the power differential that is inevitable in the relationship between the researcher and the researched? What is the best way to represent the voices of others—or should I?* In the beginning, I sought answers to these questions, exploring a variety of research traditions, philosophies, and methodologies, but eventually I realized the futility of that quest! Clearly, these are issues that researchers continually grapple with in all research settings, and I realized I would have to be content with defining my own understanding and identity. I was not interested in (or suited to) assessing numerical or quantitative measures of human experience, and I knew that I was not a positivist: I could not accept the idea that an objective reality exists, waiting to be explored and verified through scientific method: “Knowledge is not logically ordered and waiting to be discovered; rather, it is constructed in experiences of the whole body and being” (Slattery, 2006, p. 246). I was strongly influenced by the work of sociolinguist James Gee:

Think about the matter this way: out in the world exist materials out of which we continually make and remake our social worlds. The social arises when we humans relate (organise, coordinate) these materials together in a way that is recognisable to others. We attempt to get other people to recognise people and things as having certain meanings and values within certain configurations or relationships. Our attempts are what I mean by ‘enactive work’. Other people’s active efforts to accept or reject our attempts—to see or fail to see things ‘our way’—are what I mean by ‘recognition work’. ... We spend our lives always and also engaging in enactive work from inside the configurations we work in to get recognised in certain ways. We coordinate ourselves (in mind, body, and soul) with the other elements in configurations (things, places, times, tools, symbols, other people, ways of acting, interacting, valuing, thinking, etc.) and, in turn, we get coordinated by them. (Gee, 2000, p. 192)

I was committed to this constructivist perspective, including the idea that research contributes to the construction of social realities. As theorist John Law expressed it:

It is not possible to separate out (a) the making of particular *realities*, (b) the making of particular *statements* about those realities, and (c) the creation of *instrumental, technical and human configurations and practices*, the inscription devices that produce these realities and statements. Instead, *all are produced together*. Scientific realities only come along with inscription devices. Without inscription devices, and the inscriptions and statements that these produce, there are no realities. (Law, 2004, p. 31; original italics)

These thoughts impressed me with the weight of responsibility I was accepting by engaging in research—not only by investigating peoples’ lives but also by making interpretations of what I was discovering. I also had to realize that I cared more about doing work that might help the world in some small, local, immediate way and only tangentially interested in producing knowledge for the academy—and I wanted to do this work collaboratively. My interest in the qualities of human experience and my constructivist leanings led me toward qualitative social science research where I found many approaches and examples which reinforced for me several foundational methodological beliefs. However, even among the diverse methods and principles represented by the vast territory of traditional ethnographies, I could not quite find my research ‘home’.

While I felt drawn toward the intentions and theoretical underpinnings of most of the qualitative research I was encountering, I was troubled by what I saw as residual traces of the historical ‘hard-sciences’ roots of social science research. An emphasis on attempting to remain as ‘neutral’ or ‘objective’ as possible is reflected in language that seems to remove emotion or creates a distance between a researcher and the people participating in a study. This concern became very real and significant for me ‘in the field’. I found it very uncomfortable to label as ‘data’ all the delightful, intimate conversations I had recorded in our study group—or to think of these three women who had become my friends as ‘subjects’ or ‘respondents’ or even ‘participants’. I felt there was a conflict between my identity (and obligations) as a co-teacher-inquirer/friend, and my identity as a researcher. I tried to work through this in my journal:

I think I am partly worried about analyzing friendships in that it somehow feels like a betrayal to expose our conversations and creations to a public that will ask questions and probe for meaning. Also the true value of the experience—the love and caring and affirmation that developed—can’t really be represented in traditional academic genres, I think.

Also, this process separates me from the group—I have to take our friendships and shared evenings and make ‘knowledge’ out of them—which puts me in a different position from the others, and it feels somehow opposed to the collaborative and egalitarian way we have related all along. As a researcher, I am required to make selections and pronouncements about what I think was significant in our experiences, and in that way my voice counts more than theirs. “I am telling our story” is not the same as “We are telling our story”. I want to find a way to include all of us in this process... but I’m not sure they’re terribly interested...

A quote from Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006) is troubling me (from Chap 5 in *Reading Images...*p. 165):

“Higher education in our society is to quite some extent, an education in detachment, abstraction and decontextualization (and against naturalism), and this results in an attitude which does not equate the appearance of things with reality, but looks for a deeper truth ‘behind appearances’. Just as academically trained persons may accord greater truth to abstract expository writing than to stories about concrete, individual events and people, so they may also place higher value on visual representations which reduce events and people to the ‘typical’, and extract from them the ‘essential qualities’.”

Writing a thesis *requires* that I look for “the deeper truth” or “essential qualities” that might be distilled from our shared experience—and that separates me from the rest of the group who can just enjoy having lived it. I think I am feeling a conflict between my ‘teacher/friend’ self, which places a very high value on relationships and what is due to others in terms of trust, equality, honesty, and my ‘scholar’ identity which—while equally valuing trust, equality and honesty in relationships—is also expected to abstract some significance out of these relationships and shared conversations and to relate those insights to theoretical work by other scholars.

The ethnographic and other varieties of social science research I was reading did not talk about doing research in which ‘subjects’ became friends. It seemed to me that at least some of these studies must have resulted in the formation of close bonds between the researcher and the participants, but allusions to friendship, emotional moments, or even doubts and setbacks all seemed to be excluded from the discourse. As Laurel Richardson puts it: “adherence to the model requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants... [T]hat model shuts down the creativity and sensibilities of the individual researcher” (Richardson, 1994, p. 517). Unable to fully embrace this abstracted quality—the ‘science’ of social science research, perhaps—but still respecting the traditions and history (and the practitioners) of established qualitative

research, I ventured out onto the fringes into less established traditions and practices, exploring action research, feminist participatory research, arts-based research, somaesthetics, and indigenous research. In the critical indigenous research of Tomaselli, Dyll and Francis (2008), for example, I found an approach that harmonized with my own beliefs and aims:

We aim to develop methods in situ, from the guts of our field experiences, not only to take pre-digested reified textbook methods “to go”. However, one should of course also work with conventional approaches as they offer complementary analysis via different, related, lenses and cast light on what we think we are doing. (Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis, 2008, pp. 347-348).

In my quest to define myself and my research practice—to articulate what ‘I thought I was doing’—I discovered scholars who share my commitments to a constructivist stance that acknowledges multiple ways of knowing the world and accepts a personal voice in research. What follows is an attempt to articulate the pillars of my research credo, the various methodological influences that shaped my thinking, and how I put those influences into action in this particular study.

3.2. Four fundamental methodological beliefs

Research Belief #1: Research is not disembodied: diligent research takes account of emotions, physical reactions, embodied assumptions and intuitive responses.

The traditional positivist emphasis on disembodied rational intellectualism short-changes the range and power of human mental life. It is an ideology which is particularly resistant to change in spite of scholarly challenges mounted over several decades. The challenges expressed by feminists—“Feminist scholarship is proposing and using experience, intuition, and evaluation as alternative modes of knowing” (Maguire, 1987, p. 87)—have been taken up by many other scholars from a range of perspectives; somaesthetic philosopher Richard Shusterman, for example, states:

- Mental life relies on somatic experience and cannot be wholly separated from bodily processes, even if it cannot be wholly reduced to them. (Shusterman, 2012, p. 27)

- Feelings, as William James long ago argued and as neuroscience confirms today, tend to direct our thinking, and strong emotions tend to compel attention and often also belief; such emotions, in turn, are deeply grounded in the body and cannot be adequately understood without it. (Shusterman, 2012, p. 164)

Multimodal social semiotics scholar Gunther Kress would also agree:

Human bodies have a wide range of means of engagement with the world...These we call our 'senses'....Western societies have for too long insisted on the priority of a particular form of engagement, through a combination of hearing and sight....This has gone so far that we have no means of representing whole areas of our sensory lives by either talking or writing. (Kress, 2000b, p. 184)

Although as yet we seem to have little real understanding of such mental functions as intuition and imagination, I cannot accept their elimination from the practice of research. I wish to openly acknowledge that I experienced and relied on moments of intuitive understanding in my analysis of our group's relationships and experiences. While I can recognize and reflect on my emotional reactions and experiences both as a member of the study group and as a researcher combing through collected documents, memories, notes, and artistic pieces, I cannot fully separate my emotions from my interpretations. Undoubtedly emotions—and imagination—have been part of the meaning-making process of creating this dissertation—and I feel strongly that the representation of my research needs to reflect that. I will return to the issue of representation later in this chapter.

Research Belief #2: Research is an attempt to apply honest, diligent, rational meaning-making to a complex world full of uncertain, irrational or extra-rational phenomena and is therefore not conclusive: it is tentative, interim, contingent.

I align myself with scholars who resist the positivist quest for certainty and conclusive 'answers'. Elliot Eisner puts my own goal simply: The aim is not "Truth" but "fallible versions of the world that we can use" (Eisner, 1998, p. 215). John Law expresses it somewhat more comprehensively:

I want to argue that while standard methods are often extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular. (Law, 2004, p. 4)

We will need to unmake many of our methodological habits, including: the desire for certainty; the expectation that we can usually arrive at more or less stable conclusions about the way things really are; the belief that as social scientists we have special insights that allow us to see further than others into certain parts of social reality; and the expectations of generality that are wrapped up in what is often called 'universalism'. But, first of all we need to unmake our desire and expectation for security. (Law, 2004, p. 9)

Traditional academic discourse does not comfortably make space for untidy, tangled or looping connections of ideas, interpretations, or events. "Published ethnographic studies are written as coherent wholes, and the mess and chaos of everyday life is hidden from the transcript or streamlined into often beguiling theoretical coherence" (Tomaselli et al., 2008, p. 353). As I worked to make sense of our group's experience and to represent this meaning faithfully, I felt the pull toward ensuring a "beguiling theoretical coherence", but this troubled me. I appreciate deeply the aesthetic elegance of 'flawless' theoretical congruity—but I wish to resist the temptation to "distort into clarity" (Law, 2004, p. 2) the often ambiguous, contradictory, and shifting nature of lived realities. Nor am I interested in articulating a universally applicable generalization or a final answer to anything. In analyzing and representing the results of my study, I simply wish to offer my observations and interpretations of the experiences I shared with my colleagues in the hope that these might contribute to a larger conversation about teacher reflection.

Research Belief #3: Research is neither objective nor universal: it is personal, political, partial, selective, and generative. Ultimately research is as much about the researcher as it is about the researched.

The image of the researcher as coolly objective and distanced from the inquiry has been challenged for decades from many angles (Richardson, 1994), and yet I feel pressured to represent myself and my study in as voiceless and impersonal a way as possible. Why does this pressure persist? That is a question for another day, but meanwhile I align myself with those who frankly acknowledge the political nature of research:

- Feminist, Patti Lather: "Absolute knowledge was never possible anyway. Archimedean standpoints have always been shaped in the crucible of the power/knowledge nexus" (Lather, 1991, p. 117).

- Arts-based researcher, Elliot Eisner: “Method—whether it pertains to research or to teaching—is ultimately a political undertaking. The forms we employ exclude as well as invite” (Eisner, 1998, p. 246).
- Critical pedagogues, Joe Kincheloe, Peter McLaren, and Shirley Steinberg:
 - “Facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription.
 - All thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted.
 - Mainstream research practices are generally, although most often unwittingly, implicated in the reproduction of systems of class, race, and gender oppression” (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 164).

It is futile, then, to write as though I can decontextualize my inquiry process or take myself out of it. I aim to remain open to multiple possible interpretations and analyses, not to close down the process or seize on the first convenient understanding that occurs to me. But I must simultaneously acknowledge that I am inevitably implicated at every stage. Eisner puts it succinctly: “Perception is selective and...the motives for selection are influenced by the tools one has or knows how to use: We tend to seek what we know how to find” (Eisner, 1997, p. 7). I identify strongly with the perspective expressed by education scholar Bonnie Waterstone:

In writing this dissertation, I am not attempting to remain innocent: I acknowledge my complicity, even as I try to practice representation as ethically as possible. I am aware that my study ... has effects on my own life and the life of the group, effects that can be known and acknowledged, others that remain unconscious and others that are yet to be known. My concern is that I remember my responsibility to and my care for the lives of those I study. (Waterstone, 2003, p. 32)

I also agree with Waterstone that although I may wish to be transparent about my own biases, viewpoints, and social location, there are limits to my reflexivity.

I agree that it is important, as a researcher, to pay attention to which stories I tell and to acknowledge my interpretations and the possible consequences of my selective story-making...However, I recognize that I cannot completely know my investments, desires, or the consequences of my study....Further, my attempt to state my position is necessarily situated in this moment and I don't seem to stand still for the process. As I compose my thoughts on 'how my life informs this thesis inquiry,' my knowing is changing over time, shifting even as I write. (Waterstone, 2003, p. 18)

Waterstone's frank self-assessment harmonizes with those views that understand 'representation' as a generative process: "Realities are produced along with the statements that report them" (Law, 2004, p. 38). For me, this perspective raises questions about the use of the word 'representation'—implying as it does the re-presentation of something that already exists... but can knowledge exist before it is expressed?

Writing is not just a mopping up activity at the end of a research project. Writing is also a way of "knowing"—a method of discovery and analysis.... I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I didn't know before I wrote it. (Richardson, 1994, pp. 516-517)

Multimodal scholars share Richardson's understanding that knowledge must be enacted to become knowledge: "Until 'knowledge' is 'made material' in a specific mode, it has no 'shape': we cannot 'get at it.' To me it is not at all clear what knowledge is before it is made material in a representation" (Kress, 2011, p. 211); however, these scholars would expand the claim to encompass *any* mode of expression (Bezemer & Kress, 2008; Jewitt, 2008, Jewitt, 2013; Kress, 2011). To me, the 'situatedness' and deeply personal nature of knowledge and research is inescapable, however the account is given. The stories I choose to tell or not to tell, the modes of expression I choose, my understanding of the context within which I work and the audience I address—all these elements of knowledge-making are expressions of my own agency and identity, which are, as Waterstone acknowledges, not static. Teacher educator and curriculum theorist Anthony Clarke expresses my own view:

My particular rendering of the interaction...is a generative reconstruction of a...lived event. Unavoidably, I am deeply implicated in the retelling. ...The story and 'I' are interwoven and...I reveal as much about myself as I do about the [actors]. The rendering of 'the other' is a rendering of 'self'—of myself. I am forever changed by the remembering and retelling. As I write 'the text' I am written by 'the text'. (Clarke, 2012, p. 61)

I align myself with these scholars who understand research as a creative act and who resist the positivist understanding of research as the revelation of stable, objective realities. I bring my whole self to the task of inquiry and, although I aim to take as broad, open and multi-angled view as possible, I cannot separate myself from the process at any stage.

Research Belief #4: Research is both a craft and a way of being in the world—an attempt to make sense of some phenomenon through a focused process of observation, reflection, analysis, reflection, synthesis, and reflection.

Quite early in my graduate studies, I began to realize that learning to do research entailed an identity shift: learning to be ‘a researcher’ was not the same as being ‘a teacher educator who did research’. I came to understand that research is not just a task for which I was learning some skills; nor is it even an identity to be put on and off like a jacket, but it was becoming a way of operating in the world. This intuition led me to explore a range of interpretations of what being a qualitative researcher means to scholars from a variety of backgrounds, and to seek out beliefs and values that I could identify with and perhaps synthesize into some kind of coherence for myself. Once again, the discourse seemed to shut out the very things I was seeking: personal statements, emotional engagement...human stories of what being a researcher is really like. I found these (or sometimes shards of these) in research traditions that stood mostly outside the mainstream of qualitative research—feminism, arts-based inquiry, somaesthetics, indigenous research—and from these sometimes marginalized approaches, I have taken elements that shape and reflect my definition of the practice of research. I offer here four quotations which I believe require no further comment from scholars who have been influential in my quest to define my research identity:

- Elliot Eisner: “Qualitative thinking permeates our daily life...To limit qualitative inquiry to the conduct of research or evaluation is to miss the fundamental role it plays in the generation of consciousness” (Eisner, 1998, p. 1).
- Karen Meyer: “What is living inquiry? It is not a philosophy of life, a methodology to be followed, or an analytical tool. For me, it is simply an inquiry into how to live with the quality of awareness that sees newness, truth, and beauty in daily life” (Meyer, 2010, p. 96).
- John Law: “Method? ...It is not just a set of techniques. It is not just a philosophy of method, a methodology.... It is also, and most fundamentally, about a way of being... it is about the kinds of people that we want to be and about how we should live” (Law, 2004, p. 10).
- Denzin and Lincoln: “A methodology of the heart (Pelias, 2004), a prophetic, feminist postpragmatism that embraces an ethic of truth grounded in love, care, hope, and forgiveness, is needed” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p. 3).

3.3. Specifying my research identity

The four belief statements discussed above define my vision of qualitative research methodology—in any area or subject. They provide for me a foundation for the kind of research I want to do. I would like to add to those statements three other qualities which may not apply to all research, so I mention them separately as specific to my own goals and interests.

I want to do research that aims to bring about some good change in the world, research that points toward positive action (in my case, in educational practice and teacher education). My aim is not just to understand the educational world, but to change it—at least to make some modest contribution toward change. I approach research, as I approach teaching, from a critical stance, and I would like to provide support to those “countless good teachers [who] work every day to subvert the negative effects of the system but need help from like-minded colleagues and organizations... teachers who want to mitigate the effects of power on their students” (Kincheloe, McLaren & Steinberg, 2011, p. 167). My understanding of the political nature of schooling and the workings of power in education are influenced by critical theorists such as Michel Foucault and critical pedagogy theorists such as Paulo Freire, Joe Kincheloe, Henry Giroux, and Michael Apple. I identify strongly with Henry Giroux’s comment in a recent interview:

Education has to be reclaimed. It has to have a very different mission and a different purpose—and a very different set of practices. It’s not about methods. It’s basically about educating people in ways that enhance their sense of critique, to expand their critical imagination, to lead them to believe that in order to act otherwise they have to be able to think otherwise—and it also has to suggest that they have to do it collectively. You can’t do it individually. So you need a formative culture at work that once again reclaims all those things that matter in a civic culture: compassion, justice, equality, the ability to relate to others in a way that expands and deepens the very process of democracy itself. (Giroux, 2014)

To maintain such a stance as a teacher within the public school system is extremely difficult and emotionally draining. Zembylas has shown how “the emotional rules developed in schools and legitimated through the exercise of power are used to ‘govern’ teachers by putting limits on their emotional expressions in order to ‘normalize’ them”

(Zembylas, 2003, p. 123). I hope that my understanding of public school teaching might combine with my research to find a way to support teachers who wish to work 'from within' to address social inequities that are reinforced in schools. My goal is, as Patti Lather puts it, to create a space where "we can think and act with one another into the future in ways that both mark and loosen limits" (Lather, 1991, p. 101).

I want to do research that strives for a non-hierarchical relationship with collaborators, a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocity. I believe that ethical research requires "the involvement of people in creating, conducting, owning, and judging research about themselves" (Canella & Manuelito, 2008, p. 49). In this I align myself with many intertwining branches of participatory action research, feminist research, and feminist participatory action research (Walsh & Lorenzetti, 2014) as well as with much indigenous inquiry. I strongly identify with the perspective described by Ojibwe scholar Mary Hermes:

I approached the research methods as something that could change over the course of the research. To start, my only guide was that what I did and how I did it were 'situated responses', specific to the culture, the problem, and the dynamics of the particular context. One other guiding principle emerged over time: Be in the community as a member first and a researcher second. In this way the community itself influenced and shaped the methods. The relationships I enjoyed were not designed just to extract information or to exploit an 'insider' perspective. The work I did was based on mutual respect and reciprocity, as a person who was deeply invested in studying a problem but not willing to prioritize this over the relationships created in the process. (Hermes, 1998, p. 166)

However, I am aware of several possible pitfalls, no matter how earnestly a researcher may wish to engage participants as equals. Feminist Gesa Kirsch, for example, cautions that the power differences between researcher and researched cannot be completely eliminated, and that researchers' and participants' priorities often diverge, leading to possible misunderstandings or feelings of betrayal (Kirsch, 2005). As well, in spite of my wish to contribute in some way toward addressing social inequities, I am also aware that similar power inequities can complicate the desire to help. Denos, Toohey, Neilson and Waterstone (2009) have illustrated how receiving help can imply deficiency or inferiority: a 'helper/helpee' relationship is not equal.

The problem lies primarily with the lack of self-determination commonly experienced by "helpees". It seems that often dignity must be forfeited in order to receive help. The power to decide where and when help should take place, who should help us, and whether in fact help is needed is stripped away. (Van der Klift & Kunc, 1994, quoted in Denos et al., 2009, pp. 128-129)

As a neophyte researcher I felt very hesitant to conduct research in which I had to take on the role of 'outsider offering help' to someone or some group in which I had no place or position; I could see how a well-intentioned but inexperienced researcher could blunder into people's lives causing distress rather than bringing strength and hope. In order to minimize that hazard, I resolved to conduct a study involving participants who were members of communities with which I was familiar (teachers, graduate students) and who shared some key perspectives (the value of the arts, a critical view of education, a desire to improve practice). I will discuss more fully the relationships that developed in our group in Chapter 4.

I want to do research that makes room for multiple forms of expression and representation, recognizing that expository prose cannot do it all. I believe that other aesthetic forms or communicative modes—stories, poetry, images, even music and dance—have a place in research. Not surprisingly, I am supported in this view by scholars in arts-based inquiry and multimodal semiotics.

From arts-based research:

- Susan Finley: "There are varied ways in which the world can be known, and broadening the range of perspectives available for constructing knowledge increases the informative value of research" (Finley, 2005, p. 685).
- Elliot Eisner: "We take prose for granted. Indeed, we seem to believe that literal prose can say it all. It can't" (Eisner, 1998, p. 235).

From multimodal education:

- Carey Jewitt: "All modes in a communicative event or text contribute to meaning...all modes are partial. Therefore, no one mode stands alone in the process of making meaning... This has significant implications in terms of epistemology and research methodology" (Jewitt, 2008, p. 247).
- Gunther Kress: "Multimodality poses a challenge to the long-held and still widely dominant notion that 'language' is that resource for making meaning that makes possible the 'expression' of all thoughts, experiences, feelings,

values, attitudes; in short, the pillar that guarantees human rationality” (Kress, 2011, p. 208).

Other qualitative scholars also believe that the complexities of the world cannot all be caught in academic prose (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Gitlin, 2008; Law, 2004; Parry & Johnson, 2007; Richardson, 2000; Tomaselli, Dyll & Francis, 2008). I agree with these theorists “the actual ambiguities and contradictions of lived realities make for difficult writing [and are] far too complex for single approaches” (Tomaselli et al, 2008 p. 348-253), and I want to argue for multiple approaches to analysis and representation: “Creative arts is one lens through which to view the world; analytical/science is another. We see better with two lenses. We see best with both lenses focused and magnified” (Richardson, 2000, p. 254).

I am further influenced by scholars who extend this critique of traditional representation to question the concept of ‘validity’ in relation to representing human experience. Mainstream social scientists have traditionally believed that ‘proper’ (i.e., neutral and objective) representation can reveal lived experience (Parry & Johnson, 2007)—for example, that a literal transcription of conversation represents that moment as it was experienced. However, I align myself with scholars who question the assumption “that a genuine valid account of lived experience exists and that such an account can be understood, captured and/or represented by scholars” (Parry & Johnson, 2007, p. 122). Literal transcriptions of dialogue are very useful records, but they fall short of capturing the full enactment of embodied interactions, and they reveal little or nothing of the physical and social context of the encounter (Derry et al., 2010). Even the use of video-recording rather than audio-recording, while it provides more information regarding gestural communication and setting, is still subjected to interpretation and selective editing by the researcher during analysis and representation. Visual ethnographer Sarah Pink acknowledges the limits of recorded images:

...rather than recording reality on video tape or camera film, the most one can expect is to represent those aspects of experience that are visible, or that the person being represented/representing themselves seeks to visualize or make visible. Moreover, these visible elements of experience will be given different meanings as different people use their own subjective knowledge to interpret them. (Pink, 2007, p. 32)

For me, the assumed neutrality of social science writing is a fiction. Laurel Richardson points out the value-laden metaphors and conventions that define it. She cites examples of metaphors for theory as building or constructing: “What is the *foundation* of your theory? Your theory needs *support*...Let’s *construct* an argument...” (Richardson, 1994, p. 519). “Immanent in these metaphors are philosophical and value commitments so entrenched and familiar that they can do their partisan work in the guise of neutrality, passing as literal” (Richardson, 1994, p. 519). I see the representation of research as inevitably ‘interpretation’—analytic, creative, and deeply personal—and therefore see no reason to exclude fictive, poetic, autobiographical and other personal texts and expressions from social science inquiry.

In fact, I would argue that metaphors and other figures of speech are necessary in that they help to address the problem of expressing inexact or ambiguous events, perspectives or ideas.

The use of metaphor may be seen as an attempt to capture the complexities of human experience, for metaphorical speech or writing is poetic and defies linearity and the urge to ‘nail down’ meaning. (Patteson, 1999, p. 50)

Metaphors appeal to the imagination—a “reorientation of consciousness” (Greene 1997)—and invite playful thinking, unpredicted perspectives, empathetic interpretations (Greene, 1997; Patteson, 1999; Ryan, 2012; Swanwick, 2007). These are qualities needed not only for research but are “precisely those needed to keep us intellectually flexible, creative and energetic in modern societies” (Egan & Ling, 2002, p. 95). The defence of metaphor is not exclusive to arts-based research; however, it is strongly expressed in that arena. Metaphor is recognized as not confined to artistic activity but is accepted as a fundamental characteristic of all arts:

In the arts metaphor is deliberately and explicitly sought and celebrated, generating impact and creating meaning. This is a unique element of artistic endeavour that distinguishes it from scientific work, which has what Dewey might call a difference in emphasis ... The focus of the arts is on metaphorical impact rather than verifiable scientific knowledge. (Swanwick, 2007, pp. 497-498)

In comparing the likeness and unlikeness of two things, a metaphor locates meaning in concrete terms that include the senses and feelings—aspects of human experience that are often left out of ‘scientific’ writing. As “an enemy to abstraction” metaphorical comparisons belong in research, along with intuition, feelings, and uncertainties:

[Metaphor] inhabits language at its most concrete. As the shocking extension of the unknown into our most intimate, most feeling, most private selves, metaphor is the enemy of abstraction. (Ozick, 1992, p. 282)

In my wish to openly acknowledge the elements of imagination and creativity in research—certainly in my own work—I am encouraged by the work of scholars such as Andrew Gitlin whose “educational poetics” prioritizes “invention, not accuracy” and challenges “the cultural codes of a research discourse that separates out the mind from the body” (Gitlin, 2008, p. 629). Theorist Patrick Slattery agrees, citing a host of respected scholars from a range of research traditions:

Freire, Langer, Barone, Schon, Oliver, Gershman, Beyer, LePage, Greene, Orr, and Eisner, among others, warn of the harmful consequences of our continued attachment to modern models of rationality that avoid artistic, intuitive, and nonrational ways of knowing. (Slattery, 2006, p. 253)

Making space for emotion, intuition, imagination, and figurative modes of representation acknowledges that research is about creating meanings, offering interpretation, allowing for multiple perspectives and interpretations. Once again, Elliot Eisner expresses my own view: the kind of research that interests me “is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity.... Multiple perspectives will emerge.... Ironically, good research often complicates our lives” (Eisner, 1997, p. 8).

To conclude this statement of my research credo I offer selected excerpts from a poem by Canadian philosopher-musician Jan Zwicky. It is not a poem about research (such a poem would be a rare specimen indeed!) but it provides a figurative expression of several of my core beliefs about how I see research as a way of being in the world.

Excerpts from: *Practising Bach* by Jan Zwicky

Practising Bach

For performance with Bach's E Major Partita for Solo Violin, BWV 1006

Prelude

There is, said Pythagoras, a sound
the planet makes: a kind of music
just outside our hearing, the proportion
and the resonance of things—not
the clang of theory or the wuthering
of human speech, not even
the bright song of sex or hunger, but
the unringed ringing that
supports them all.

The wife, no warning, dead
when you come home. Ducats
in the fishheads that you salvage
from the rubbish heap. Is the cosmos
laughing at us? No. It's saying
improvise. Everywhere you look
there's beauty, and it's rimed
with death. If you find injustice
you'll find humans, and this means
that if you listen, you'll find love.
The substance of the world is light,
is water: here, clear
even when it's dying; even when the dying
seems unbearable, it runs.

Loure

Why is Bach's music more like speech than any other? Because
of its wisdom, I think. Which means its tempering of lyric
passion by domesticity, its grounding of the flash of lyric
insight in domestic earth, the turf of dailiness.

Let us think of music as a geometry of the emotions.
Bach's practice, then, resembles that of the Egyptians: earth's
measure as a way of charting the bottomlands of the Nile,
the floodwaters of the heart, as a way of charting life. Opera,
Greek tragedy, Romantic poetry tell us that sex and death are

what we have to focus on if we want to understand any of the rest. Bach's music, by contrast, speaks directly to, and of, life itself—the resonant ground of sex and death.

And it does this not without ornamentation, but without fuss: the golden ratio in the whelk shell lying on the beach, the leaf whorl opening to sun, the presence of the divine in the chipped dish drying in the rack, *that* miracle: good days, bad days, a sick kid, a shaft of sunlight on the organ bench. *Talk to me, I'm listening.*

Loure

Lyric poets are always trying to approach the issue by forcing speech to aspire to the condition of music. Bach comes at it from the other end: he infuses music with a sense of the terrible concreteness, the particularity, of the world. And enlightenment?—Acceptance of, delight in, the mystery of incarnation.

Gigue

There is a sound
that is a whole of many parts,
a sorrowless transparency, like luck,
that opens in the centre of a thing.
An eye, a river, fishheads, death,
gold in your pocket, and a half-wit
son: the substance of the world
is light and blindness and the measure
of our wisdom is our love.
Our diligence: ten fingers and
a healthy set of lungs. Practise
ceaselessly: there is
one art: wind
in the open spaces
grieving, laughing
with us, saying
improvise.

The poem depends on images that arc effortlessly between the universal and the particular—a connection that Zwicky sees represented in the music of J. S. Bach, and which I see as relevant to my research methodology.

In this poem the wholeness of life, its gains *and* losses—beauty and death, injustice and love—taken all together are represented as a kind of universal “resonance”, an “unrung ringing” that encompasses all of nature and human life. And this “music just outside our hearing” calls for our attention and response: “Is the cosmos laughing at us? No. It’s saying improvise”. We are called upon to participate: to be attentive and to make an authentic, creative response. The music of J. S. Bach is one such response—a particularly apt one, in the poet’s eyes, as it makes the universal accessible to us. His compositions reflect the beautiful “geometry” of the universe, but they—like “the golden ratio in the whelk shell”—are simultaneously infused “with a sense of the terrible concreteness, the particularity, of the world”. For Zwicky, his music represents wisdom: it “speaks directly to, and of, life itself” by grounding the beauty and “lyric passion” of abstraction in “domestic earth”.

I connect strongly to this vision of wisdom, or “enlightenment”—“acceptance of, delight in, the mystery of incarnation”—which arises through attending closely to “the turf of dailiness”, to the “miracle” of “good days, bad days, a sick kid, a shaft of sunlight on the organ bench”. It is for me a beautifully lyrical expression of the way I aspire to live my life—in a state of inquiry. What is research but paying attention? The “flash of lyric insight” lies in committed attention to the fullness of our lived experience, to its wonders, its precariousness, its beauties and losses: we must observe and listen closely—and then make sense of it all by responding in a way that is authentically our own, an “improvisation” that is ‘in tune’ with what we see and experience. If we are willing to be open and attentive—“*Talk to me, I’m listening*”—and to be “diligent” (or ‘rigorous’) in our practice—whether music or research (it is all “one art”)—we may be able to hear the resonance of the universe “grieving, laughing with us, saying improvise”.

I offer this poem as a kind of metaphorical summary of the beliefs that have shaped my study: respect for the value of qualitative social science, and for the qualitative research model—attentive observation of daily life, thoughtful and diligent

interpretation, and authentic representation. So now I have—I hope—articulated a methodology... but do I have a method?

3.4. Getting down to ‘domestic earth’: cultivating a method

*There is no such thing as a ‘distraction’.
If you notice something, it is speaking to you.
And then, it is the ‘listening’ that becomes important.*

(Anthony Clarke, 2012)

In my approach to this study I have drawn from both established and experimental research traditions and have quilted together a method for which I have no clear name. It was not only a blending of strategies and approaches culled from a range of traditions but it was also unique to the particular setting of the study, the group members’ interests and tolerances, and my own curiosity, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, history, and understanding of the practice of research.

My ‘quilted’ approach to research might best be described by the metaphor of *bricolage* (Denzin, 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Kincheloe et al., 2011; Sclater, 2011). Bricolage, as I understand it, is not a method but is an approach to research in which the researcher adapts a “method assemblage” (Law, 2004) in response to the setting and the participants, drawing on a range of skills and approaches that best seem to fit the pragmatic needs of a real-life, concrete and sometimes shifting research situation.

The qualitative-researcher-as-*bricoleur* uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials that are at hand (Becker, 1989). If new tools have to be invented or pieced together, the researcher will do this. The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ is not set in advance. The researcher-as-*bricoleur* theorist works between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms. (Denzin, 1994, p. 17)

Because I was not pursuing the answer to a specific question but merely seeking to record and understand the life of our group, and I wanted to allow our group to define itself and its practices, I felt totally committed to approaching my task as ‘group

documenter' in a very responsive way. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) express precisely my own point of view:

The bricoleur understands that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 2)

I knew that my research practice would inevitably (how could it not?) incorporate understandings and skills from all the aspects of my life—my identities as a mother, critically-minded teacher, friend, arts-lover...—all of which include different knowledges and ways of making meaning, and I wanted to feel able to freely acknowledge rather than silence those sides of myself. I identified with arts-based researcher Patricia Leavy:

Holistic approaches to research are not only about the epistemology-theory-methods nexus, but also the relationship the researcher has with his or her work... I wanted my work to be unified and resonate with who I am within and beyond the academy. (Leavy, 2009, p. viii)

Understanding my research practice as bricolage allowed me to integrate beliefs, values, skills, and insights from my personal, professional and scholarly life experiences into my research activities (including my writing).

The bricolage is dedicated to a form of rigor that is conversant with numerous modes of meaning making and knowledge production—modes that originate in diverse social locations. These alternative modes of reasoning and researching always consider the relationships, the resonances and the disjunctions between formal and rationalistic modes of Western epistemology and ontology and different cultural, philosophical, paradigmatic, and subjugated expressions. (Kincheloe et al., 2011, p. 169)

By “different cultural...and subjugated expressions” I am pretty confident that Kincheloe is referring to ethnographic studies of immigrant, indigenous or other non-dominant communities in Western societies, but I am equally confident that he would not exclude non-dominant voices *within* Western society—voices such as those of middle-aged female teacher-inquirers who bring the embodied understandings of their multiple identities and life experiences into contact with scholarship. I welcome his claim that

“numerous modes of meaning making and knowledge production” may be integrated with “a form of rigor” through the metaphor of bricolage.

To approach research as a bricoleur came naturally to me—it seems I am a bricoleur in *many* aspects of my life. It is a legacy from my mother who grew up on the Canadian prairies during the Depression. In our household we unconsciously absorbed her ability to ‘make do’ with what was at hand—which was sometimes frustrating (we lived with the same set of cheap kitchen knives for all 19 years I lived at home—neatly sliced tomatoes were unachievable). But sometimes making do was quite a joyful and creative act—I remember wanting to be Cleopatra on Hallowe’en and my mom helping me make a costume out of a sheet and some old jewellery and (real!) eye make-up... I felt regal—but what I also remember was the fun of creating it together, of learning to see how something could be made from something else. When my brother wanted to be a pirate, they made him an eye patch from fabric scraps, and she attached a rubber band to a shower-curtain ring and hung the rubber band around his ear—which actually looked exactly like a storybook pirate earring. I took this attitude with me into my professional life as a teacher. Most teachers are, on some level, scavengers—always on the lookout for useful classroom materials, ideas, or strategies—and are usually very willing to share or exchange. I became adept at seeing how I could adapt all kinds of materials—even those seemingly unconnected to my curriculum—to suit my own teaching needs. Classroom teaching also requires the ability to improvise in the moment, to change course unexpectedly, to adapt to unexpected circumstances (a teaching reality which will be illustrated quite vividly in Chapter 5). So I came to the task of research with a history which prepared me to be willing to—and to enjoy—exercising ingenuity in responding to the needs of the moment. My beliefs about what research is, should be, or should do, and the kinds of research I want to conduct, align with the multidisciplinarity, responsiveness, and pragmatism of a bricolage approach.

3.5. Documenting: Collecting and analyzing dialogic texts

Our open and flexible approach to our collaboration meant that I had to be similarly flexible in my research. This did not present a problem since I was not pursuing a specific research question; rather, my intention was to ‘see what would happen’—to

track, document, and interpret (collectively) the development of the group and its activities. I had a vision of what we might do or accomplish but I felt strongly that the group needed to set its direction collaboratively. As our association grew, and we were all delighted with how everything was unfolding for us, the group members were pleased at the idea of having our reflective work collected and our collaboration documented. We discussed several times whether or not we wanted to create some sort of artistic product or performance to tell our story, but the degree of energy and commitment such a project would require was beyond the limits for each of us; everyone was juggling the many demands of our own ongoing projects, our jobs and complex personal lives. So it became my role to collect and record our individual creations and our shared activities and practices. Along the way, I adapted my original vision according to the needs and interests of the group—those came first, and research considerations came second. In this way my perspective paralleled the methodological approach described by Mary Hermes (1998), documenting the development of relevant curriculum in an Ojibwe tribal school.

At the outset of this project I could not anticipate what steps I would need to take in order to explore these questions—some of the questions came about during the research, not before it...What I have done in my research is to constantly amend the process as responses from the community informed what I was doing.... I tried to approach this research in ways that strengthened existing relationships of reciprocity, community relationships. My writing came from a process of being a part of discussions, listening to stories, and reflecting on practices....The relationships, of reciprocity and respect, ordered the methods. This made my research a 'process' that cannot be replicated but that is situated within the particular relationships among myself and other community members. (Hermes, 1998, pp. 164-165)

Also like Mary Hermes, I occupied multiple identity positions in the group during the course of the study.

At moments I was the 'organizer' or facilitator and could control the agenda, but when it was time to eat I was just as easily a 'waitress' or, at the meeting's end, a 'driver'. In many social contexts with the Elders I was simply a 'young person' or a 'helper.' So, although I set the meeting dates or held the tape recorder in an interview, these positions of 'power' could quickly vanish in a different setting.... I continually tried to involve community members in all levels of the project, to recognize my position as 'not the expert,' and to problematize the positions of power I did

occupy. However, at some point I had to recognize that I did occupy them, even though I tried not to reinscribe them. (Hermes, 1998, pp. 163)

In a similar way, I was very much involved in the group's activities on all levels, sometimes initiating, sometimes following. I often took responsibility for co-ordinating meeting dates but I did not try to set a direction or an agenda for the group—I made suggestions and proposals, as we all did, and we consensually defined our agendas.

Over our next three years together, we met every two or three weeks during the instructional months of each school year. I videotaped each of our reflective conversations and transcribed them, and I collected copies of the multimodal work we had shared, some of which was print, some visual, some a combination of both. Toward the end of the three years, I arranged an individual semi-structured interview with each member of the group; these were professionally videotaped by a university videographer, and I transcribed each one. Although at that time I had not begun a thorough formal analysis of our texts, I had noted (as had other members of the group) that our conversations often returned to a few significant themes, so I made a point of including questions that focused on these key topics. Altogether I had a wide variety of texts which provided a rich resource for analysis processes of sifting, sorting, comparing, and coding.

I had chosen to videotape rather than audiotape our conversations because I wanted a fully embodied visual record of our conversations. As Derry et al. (2010) point out:

Video provides rich records of interactional phenomena, including eye gaze, gesture, body posture and proximity, content of talk, tone of voice, facial expressions, and use of physical artifacts, as well as between-person processes such as the alignment and maintenance of joint attention. (Derry et al., 2010, p. 17)

Initially, I was unsure of how much of such detail I would need. I knew I was going to focus on the content of the dialogue, and I wanted the visual footage not as 'data' in itself but as support for accurate transcriptions and interpretations of the conversations. As I transcribed each videotape, I used the visual record to make note of emotion or emphasis to include in the print transcript or to watch for moments when there might

seem to be a disconnect between a speaker's words and her apparent feeling or gestures. I made brief reflective notes regarding recurring conversational themes, and for the first few months I also coded the transcripts for each speaker's role and function in the conversation. I was looking for evidence of dominance or supportiveness, leadership, turn-taking, following up on or changing the subject. After these early months, I realized that there seemed to be no consistency in how those discursive functions were fulfilled; the conversational roles were shared between all of us quite evenly, so from then on I only made note of rare occasions where something stood out as unusual. There were two evenings, for example, when my own contributions dominated the conversation; once was our first meeting when I was introducing group members to each other and explaining my vision for our collaboration, and the second was after reading an article on multiliteracies that I had proposed.

My decision not to analyze the video footage as data but merely to use it as a support for the audio-record was based on my limited experience and competence in video production and analysis. Derry et al. (2010) have observed that graduate study does not often include the development of practical video-recording skills such as

(a) knowing how to choose and place cameras and microphones, (b) deciding when to start and end shooting, (c) deciding whether to shoot mainly wide angle or close up, and (d) making panning and zooming decisions in what is called *camera editing*. (Derry et al., 2010, pp.8-9)

Due to my inexperience and for other reasons I will describe shortly, the aesthetic quality of most of the meeting footage is quite poor, and although "picture and sound that are merely visible and audible may be 'good enough', aesthetically speaking, for data mining" (Derry et al., 2010, p. 12), I felt that my video-recordings were 'good enough' only for the purpose I intended. Also, while I was aware that "it can be quite helpful to share a key video segment with a group of other researchers to gather multiple interpretations of the events, to surface salient dimensions for analysis" (Derry et al., 2010, p. 17), I did not see how I could do so without contravening the ethical requirement to maintain the anonymity of the group members. I did not feel competent to attempt a thorough discursive analysis of the visual records without benefit of an outside viewer, but I did find them very helpful in the process of making accurate transcriptions and supporting my memory of our sessions.

Because I wanted the research process to be as collaborative and participatory as possible, I was keen to get the group members' responses to the transcriptions. I wanted them not only to have access to the material that was going to form the substance of our story, but I also hoped to have their comments and afterthoughts as further material. These hopes and intentions were never realized, however. Sometimes they had no opportunity to respond because I could not complete the transcription in time before the next meeting, but more significantly I found that even when there was plenty of time to reply the group had little interest in reading through multiple pages of typed dialogue—especially as our energies were much more focused on the aesthetic projects we set ourselves as a way to 'process' our conversations and inquiries. I only received email feedback on a transcript twice, and these friendly comments simply remarked on how challenging the transcription task must be and proposed a menu for the next meeting. Reading through these records was apparently a chore, one which I felt I could not require. I did not want to dampen their enthusiasm to keep meeting and doing art and talking about our common interests. With the group's acquiescence, I continued to videotape and transcribe, but I did not circulate any more transcriptions.

Toward the end of the third year of our meetings, I began a comprehensive analysis of the meeting transcripts. I read through them all repeatedly and identified recurring themes, using the videotapes for reference or clarification whenever a transcript was confusing or incomplete or whenever I felt my understanding or interpretation needed bolstering. I then turned to the interview transcripts to make connections with themes from the meetings. This analysis made me very aware of the inadequacy of transcribed dialogue to represent a lived reality: although the words on the page managed to express some of the quality of our relationships, much more was conveyed in the video record. For example, the professionally recorded interviews demonstrate some reserve on the part of the group members, compared to our meeting conversations. In spite of the poor technical quality of our meeting recordings (I used only the available ambient lighting and furniture arrangement), they capture elements of our interactions that the transcripts cannot convey: the ebb and flow of energy and enthusiasm during a meeting or the sense of comfort, fun, intimacy, and trust that was a key part of our experience. Some of that emotional and relational content is very clearly expressed, however, in our creative pieces, so I am able to represent it in print form (in Chapters 4 to 7). Although for convenience I am here describing the transcriptions

separately from the poetry and photographs, I see all our various texts as speaking to each other as parts of a 'whole', and while I agree with Sarah Pink that "Visual methods are rarely used in isolation from other methods and, correspondingly, visual materials should be analysed in relation to other research texts" (Pink, 2007, p. 136), I also found it useful to examine the group conversations separately from the individual art pieces. In my analysis of the group conversations, five dominant themes emerged:

- Teaching the arts
- Pedagogy/teaching realities and challenges
- Academic life and learning
- Multiliteracies and the arts
- Group membership and identity

Before comparing these themes with an analysis of our creative work, I wish to add one more comment regarding the transcripts.

In representing our texts in this dissertation, I have subverted three research conventions. First, although I kept records of dates, times, and places for these texts, I have chosen to omit these details from this representation of my study. In doing so, I am presenting them not as 'pieces of data' but as representations of an experience of shared learning and friendship. Second, I have identified the quoted words of group members with different fonts and colours. Initially this was a strategy I used simply to facilitate my analysis process—I found it very helpful in locating specific quotes within my files of transcribed pages or my drafts of early chapters. However, as I continued to work with these drafts, I found I appreciated the effect of colour and font in characterizing the voices of the group. I used black for my own words, in line with the rest of the dissertation, and assigned colours to the other three voices, choosing colours that would show up easily on the computer screen and that represented for me key characteristics of each group member (reasons which I shared with the group but I wish to keep confidential). I chose fonts that would read easily in print or on a screen and would be available on any computer. Finally, unconventionally but at the request of the group members, I have used their real first names throughout my thesis. When giving a presentation of my pilot study at an early stage of my research, I had assigned them each a false name, as is customary, but when I shared my slide presentation with them

later, they were quite uncomfortable with their ‘fake’ identities. We discussed the ramifications of revealing their true identities, and I offered to let them choose their own pseudonyms, but they decided they preferred to be known by their real names—first names only. As so many scholars have pointed out (Derry et al., 2010; Law, 2004; Tomaselli et al, 2008, for example), the research process is fraught with unexpected twists, and I felt I sometimes had to make decisions based on values that conflicted somewhat with customary practice.

After analyzing the conversation transcripts, I then turned to our multimodal texts.

3.5.1. Analyzing multimodal/aesthetic texts

Over the course of the study, our multimodal reflections included 14 poems, 58 photographs (in 4 series), 2 day-in-the-life teacher-narratives, 2 wordles, 1 chart, 2 posters, 1 video, 1 mindmap, and 1 parody of a school district memorandum. Most of these creations were exchanged by email between meetings or brought to meetings and shared there. Three of the photograph series were created collaboratively during meetings. On several evenings we also experimented with a few visual art techniques; however, those creations were either never completed or did not get photographed and are not included in the study.

Following Pink (2007) and Kress and Van Leeuwen, (2006) I approached these texts taking into account their context—the time and place they were presented, the conversation around their inception and connection to previous work or conversations, and the interpretations discussed by the creator and the group. I looked for literal and figurative meanings, taking into consideration the compositional principles or techniques of each genre. I analyzed each piece for its main message as well as subordinate themes, and then I compared the pieces across genres.

This analysis yielded five main themes which were similar but not identical to the themes that emerged from our conversations. These themes were:

- Being women
- Creative expression/making art
- Group membership and identity

- Struggles with academic identity
- The teaching life

Most of these creative pieces addressed more than one of these main themes, but there was always a dominant message. Interestingly—and I will discuss this further in Chapter 6—while teaching in general and arts education in particular were the most commonly recurring themes in our conversational texts, they were represented only minimally in our multimodal work, the bulk of which was overwhelmingly devoted to exploring our identities as women, as students, as artists, and members of this particular group.

3.6. Tensions: Negotiating a researcher-participant identity

I return here to a discussion of the tension that I described in my journal entry at the beginning of this chapter—a tension between my role as a participant in the group and my role as a researcher. For a great majority of our time together, I was a member of the group first—as a woman, teacher, arts-minded person, graduate student, dark-chocolate-lover—and my identity as a researcher was in the distant background. I imposed a ‘research’ agenda on the group only when I felt I couldn’t avoid doing so. There were four occasions when I felt an awkwardness creep into our relationships as I made requests that positioned me as more ‘outside’ than ‘inside’ the group.

The first of these occurred when I asked each person to read and sign an ethics approval form. This form, provided and required by the university *Office of Research Ethics*, is several pages long and rather dense, at the very the least a nuisance to read all the way through and possibly even rather intimidating. My introduction of this form put a formal edge onto what had seemed like a casual, friendly and intimate gathering, tacitly but observably raising the question “What am I getting myself into?”. This effect was fleeting, fortunately, but definitely noticeable. The ‘research agenda’ also surfaced in those few moments at each meeting after dinner when I set up a video camera at one end of the room. This too was a fairly momentary awkwardness, as the video camera soon became invisible, a non-presence; however, it did influence my decision not to ask to rearrange furniture or increase the lighting, although I knew this was affecting the quality of the video-record.

A much more significant moment occurred, however, on the occasion—two years into the study—when I asked each member to agree to individual interviews. Our conversations together had quite consistently reiterated the value that our collaboration held for each of us, but I wondered if there might be some discontent that group members felt inhibited from discussing all together. I wanted a context in which I might be able to draw out those perspectives, if they existed. My request, however, suddenly positioned me as not just a member of the group but an 'observer', too. In those moments, I could feel that each group member was (possibly for differing reasons) slightly hesitant to agree. During the interviews themselves, there was definitely a different feeling between us than there was when we were all sharing together. The presence of the videographer certainly emphasized that difference, even though she is extremely skilled at 'disappearing' behind the camera. As well, I had sent each interviewee a set of questions ahead of time so they would not have to 'think on the spot', but that meant that they knew there was an interview agenda; as much as I tried to make the occasion seem to be 'just a conversation', I was clearly in the position of asking questions and they were in the position of being asked. The interviews were much more obviously 'research' than our meetings, and on these occasions insider/outsider identities and power relations came into the discourse, albeit tacitly.

My researcher role separated me from the group most noticeably when I began to write my thesis, and I was faced with the task of distilling the richness of our collective work into a representation that would both honour our collaboration and would also satisfy university degree requirements. Two tensions arose at this point. Bonnie Waterstone articulates the first in her study (2003) of the Teacher Action Research Group (TARG). Her study, like mine, was conducted within the boundaries of a PhD program, and she describes how the need to fulfill dissertation requirements involves certain constraints and also confers power and privilege:

The very production of this document confers increased authority and has very real material effects upon my life and my relations in the world. These effects will not be equally distributed across the group of women that I did the research with.... My position cannot be separated from... the 'cultural capital'—the symbolic authority and material benefits this accrues (Bourdieu, 1991). I am the one who has studied 'us'—and that scholarly activity confers both authority and responsibility. (Waterstone, 2003, p. 28).

I have found that in the process of composing this dissertation my researcher identity became much more predominant when we got together. Although I circulated copies of each chapter as I completed it, inviting their suggestions, comments, or other edits, their responses have been brief and few. Cheryl was the only group member who, when she had sufficient time, offered suggestions or critical comments. The others expressed approval and encouragement, they always asked ‘How’s the writing going?’, but it was clearly ‘my thing’ in terms of responsibility. Academy-destined research was outside the boundaries of what we shared as a group, compatible with but not necessary to the life of our community. I felt that the trust that we shared, that was so crucial to our creative work, depended on my dwelling in my identities as a co-participant—teacher-inquirer, woman, food enthusiast, and art-lover—and downplaying my identity as an observer-analyst, PhD candidate, thesis writer. The quotation from Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) that I included in my journal entry at the beginning of this chapter characterizes another aspect of this identity tension. I am/was separated from the group by the academic necessity to ‘make knowledge’ out of our collaboration. This perspective is echoed by Pink (2007):

Ethnographers usually re-think the meanings of photographic and video materials discussed and/or produced during fieldwork in terms of academic discourses. They therefore give them new significance that diverges from the *meanings invested in them by informants*, and from meanings assumed by ethnographers themselves at other stages of the project. (Pink, 2007, p. 124, italics mine).

There is a certain discomfort in analyzing our interactions for “new significance” or exposing our relationships to academic scrutiny. In walking this identity-tightrope in the group, and in writing our story, I have tried to keep respect and care as my highest priorities—I have aimed to live up to the model proposed by Denzin & Lincoln (2008): “an ethic of truth grounded in love, care, hope, and forgiveness”.

The next chapter tells the story of the formation of our study group, beginning as a pilot study—how we came together and why, the nature of the community we established, its practices and priorities.

Chapter 4.

Poetry, food, trust, and laughter: Essentials for inquiry

“A beginning is a very delicate time.” (Princess Irulan, *Dune*, F. Herbert)

I initiated this study with a vision of possibilities but a rather loose plan of action. I felt strongly that I wanted the group to define our collective practice collaboratively—I did not want to impose a framework, though I did offer some possibilities at our first meeting. After a short discussion we established that each of us had an individual inquiry we were pursuing, that we would share ongoing progress on our inquiry at each meeting, and that in between meetings we would email a non-expository-prose ‘reflection’ to the group. This reflection could be about any thoughts that resulted from our meetings, from our teaching, or from our specific inquiry; it could take the form of a poem, narrative, photograph, other visual art medium, or any form of expression other than expository prose paragraphs. We felt that no other structural requirements were necessary: we could adapt and revise our plans as our practice took shape.

4.1. Getting started: Establishing the ground rules

I would lay stress upon talking together, upon the mutual exchange that expresses lives actually lived together, that forges commonalities. I would work for the kind of critical reflection that can be carried on by persons who are situated in the concreteness of the world, by persons equipped for interrogation, for problematization, and for hermeneutic interpretation of the culture—of the present and the past. (Greene, 1978, p.107)

We knew we wanted a safe and trusting atmosphere that included dialogue as well as other forms of expression. Our own educational experiences had convinced us that “the single best way to improve teaching...is to provide opportunities for people to

talk to one another about their teaching....Thoughtful and intelligent people can gain important insights when they share ideas and experiences” (Poole, 2012, p. 9). We also knew, however, that discussion *alone* would not get us where we wanted to go in our reflective practice; we would need to engage in other forms of expression in order to get beyond superficial conversation and thinking. Whereas we had often observed conversations among our colleagues become derailed from focused discussion into sessions of futile venting, complaining, or blaming, we had also seen how producing a ‘product’ using writing or other means of expression—even a simple diagram or list—could help lead collegial discussions into exchanges of genuine and fruitful insights. As a group we were interested in exploring questions about schools and education and pedagogy that did not have quick or easy solutions. We wanted to bring those big questions, and sometimes doubts and fears, into a space where we could count on feeling understood, where we could express partially-formed, tentative or contradictory ideas without fear of judgment, where our feelings of self-doubt, anxiety, anger, frustration, or joy and celebration would find empathy, and where we could explore honestly and safely our struggles with the contradictions and dilemmas we faced every day. All of us had experience in the arts and valued artistic expression for ourselves and for our students, and that was an area of theory and pedagogy that we wanted to explore together. We believed with Elliott Eisner:

The selection of a form through which the world is to be represented not only influences what we can say, it also influences what we are likely to experience. ... Educational inquiry will be more complete and informative as we increase the range of ways we describe, interpret, and evaluate the educational world. (Eisner, 1998, pp. 8-9)

All of us were intrigued by the possibility of thinking about our practice in alternative and multiple ways.

4.2. How our meetings were structured

We met irregularly due to the varying demands of our work and family commitments. Meeting was complicated by the fact that we all lived and worked in disparate locations in BC’s Lower Mainland. Meeting at even the most centrally located home involved significant travel time and distance for three of the four of us, adding in

some cases over an hour to the time devoted to the group. We could not begin a meeting until five pm, and since we agreed that dinner was a necessary part of the agenda, a meeting consequently required a full evening each time; we usually did not break up until ten pm, or occasionally even later, followed by a long drive home. Two members felt this was too great a commitment to make weekly, so we attempted to meet every second week, and we did manage to do so for stretches of two or three months until those stretches would eventually be interrupted by someone's unavoidable alternate commitment. If one member was unavailable, we usually agreed to meet as a group of three.

After a few meetings a comfortable pattern developed. Our first three meetings were held on campus; after that—when we agreed to continue beyond the pilot study commitment—we decided to meet at the most centrally-located home, which was Cheryl's. Typically we would arrive individually at Cheryl's to find the dining room table set for four with good china, silverware, and cloth napkins. In winter, she would have a fire crackling in the fireplace. Sometimes we all brought a contribution toward the meal; at other times, one of us would order and pick up from a restaurant. The meal was always greeted with enthusiasm, and was a necessary accompaniment to the conversation as we caught up on 'news' from each others' lives. Initially these conversations focused on events in our working lives, but gradually, as our acquaintance deepened, all of us began to relate details, stories, or issues from our lives as graduate students, mothers, spouses, and daughters/daughters-in-law of aging parents. Books we were reading, activities we undertook for health and wellness, arts performances or conferences we attended, holiday plans...all these things were grist for the mill of conversation in the first part of the evening (usually about an hour). I did not record this part of the evening. As time went on, these conversations became increasingly personal and intimate, and I cannot know for sure, but I suspect that the presence of a camera would have inhibited the speed at which the sense of trust developed.

After dinner, the tidying-up was collaborative and efficient. Then, while I set up the video camera on a tripod, someone would produce a pot of tea, and often a bar of dark chocolate appeared. We settled onto Cheryl's big red couches and took up our focused dialogue for the evening. Usually there was no set agenda, although we would generally begin by responding to the email exchange of poetry or narrative reflections

initiated by the previous meeting, by commenting on an academic reading, or by taking turns to report on progress or insights or obstacles on our individual inquiries. Our reports on our inquiries were very informal. Each 'report' was often interrupted by questions, observations, or speculations—it was a very dialogical process. These interjections were received as supportive and were indications of close attention. As Cheryl expressed it: it was an “[opportunity to look at each other and sort of see what they have to offer ... like being really, keenly interested in what they bring to the group and their perspective on their work, but also on what you're doing, as well](#)”.

4.3. Who we were

We were all—in one way or another—focusing on developing or refining our efforts to engage our students in some form of artistic practice and/or in arts-based strategies for learning. Sometimes a specific art form was the content of the teaching; for example, as a specialist at the secondary level (Grades 8-12), Cheryl taught courses in dance and visual art exclusively. Her doctoral study involved a particular assignment in which she taught her dance students some simple techniques in digital photography and editing, had them photograph themselves as dancers, select three key images, and write reflective responses that expressed how they made meaning of these images. At our meetings she would share her observations about her students' progress through this project, what she was learning, and sometimes she would circulate passages of the writing she was doing for her thesis. At one point, her thesis committee asked her to subject herself to the same process of being photographed while dancing and then to write about the experience. She said she found it very helpful to share that process in our group before trying to write it up formally for her dissertation, and she wanted to explore the use of other artistic practices in her learning. She was reading a lot about arts-based research in her doctoral classes, but the courses provided little opportunity to apply aesthetic strategies to inquiry.

[Cheryl: I wanted to be part of this group because I saw this as an opportunity for inquiry. I didn't know what that might mean but I knew that I didn't want to continue alone in my thoughts about arts education. I thought that four like-minded arts educators—women—would provide a space to wrestle with ideas about arts education.](#)

For the other three of us, although we all possessed specialist expertise in at least one art form, teaching the arts as content was more peripheral in our practice. As an intermediate ‘generalist’ teacher (Grades 4-7), Kate taught specific visual art, drama, and movement classes to her students a few times a week, but she also incorporated those aesthetic techniques into her teaching of language arts, science, and social studies. In a language arts unit, for example, her students responded to a novel by listing four words representing the emotions of the main character and their own felt responses and then creating a gesture to represent each word. In small groups, they shared their words and gestures, from which they collaboratively created and performed a movement sequence. She also composed several videos in which her students explored the kinds of social justice issues that affected them as members of an inner city community. Early in the progress of this study, Kate’s school—which had a very tiny population—was chosen as one of several schools the Vancouver School Board had slated to close down due to budget problems. Kate played a significant leadership role in successfully appealing to the School Board to keep the school open with a new designation as a “multicultural/fine arts/inquiry-based-learning” school. Drawing on her recent Masters in Arts Education, she led her small staff in collaboratively redesigning their approaches to scheduling and curricula. This process of transformation took place over a year and a half of the study, and we all followed its progress with great interest. For Kate, one of the benefits of being in the group was a “catalytic” effect:

Kate: Some people’s curiosities are real catalysts—they’re asking ‘that’ question and you’re like ‘aaaahhhh’ [appreciative]... and you piggyback on that. So depending on who you are inviting into your circle—they can keep you swimming in the same pool or they can nudge you over the falls a bit, right?

Dara came into the group with a recently completed a graduate diploma in Dance Education and a strong commitment to expanding the variety of artistic practices in her kindergarten classroom. With a background in music and dance—both of which had been deeply meaningful in her personal life—she had always found ways to bring movement, singing, and role playing into her teaching; the diploma experience, however, had provided her with access to educational research that supported her intuitions and insights, and she felt empowered by her academic knowledge to experiment even further

with less conventional, often less print-based, strategies for teaching the kindergarten curriculum.

Dara: It's amazing what's coming out of my classroom. And the parents are saying: 'they just can't wait to get to school!'. They're producing the same work that the lady next door is doing with her worksheets, but we're not doing worksheets. But they're coming out with the alphabet, they're coming out reading, they're learning very similar things, but they're having a lot of fun doing it. And they're making decisions, and they're doing higher level thinking, ... So this process has reinforced that for me.

Dara credits her experiences creating art in our research group with helping her to understand how better to facilitate the creative process for her students and allowing her to feel free to focus on 'process' and resist the pressure she had previously felt to 'produce a reliable product':

Dara: It strengthened my belief in the process—how you can have an idea but you need time to explore. I give my kids more time to play around with things, to explore, to discover, then to talk about it, then to build, then to reflect, then to build...then, eventually, something comes out. Rather than "OK, here's step 1: put your name on your paper. Step 2: I want you to read the directions. Step 3: ... And Step 4: we all have the same bunny rabbit that's going up on the wall". So this experience reinforced that the creative process needs time to gel. And it needs to be respected. And it's messy—yes. You can't schedule it into a day—it has to have that freedom to flow. So maybe the science lesson didn't happen because this [creating] was going so well.

Over the course of the study, my own teaching shifted from working with experienced teachers undertaking graduate diploma programs, most often in arts education, to working with pre-service teachers in their professional qualification program. In these roles, I engaged in both “educating in art” and “educating through art” (Dickson, 2011); sometimes I co-taught introductory drama and movement and supported teachers as they sought ways to integrate these techniques and strategies into their own practice, while at other times I taught scholarly, aesthetic, and pedagogical content using aesthetic strategies wherever possible. Although on one level I was participating in our little group as a researcher gathering data, during our meetings that identity was subordinate to my identity as a teacher bringing doubts, questions, issues, and stories from my own practice. Teaching adults outside the public school system

proved to be closely related to teaching children in schools; although each of us taught at different age levels, ranging from kindergarten to adult, we all shared a number of concerns in common—questions, for example, about dealing with students who did not seem to fit the ‘norms’ established by educational authorities, frustrations of working within large institutions, and feelings of conflict between the professional expectation to ‘cover mandated curriculum’ and a personal wish to respond to the diverse learning needs of our students. These parallel concerns, which are expressed repeatedly throughout our conversations and texts, coupled with my own long history teaching high school, made it very easy for me to empathize with group members and to participate in the group as a teacher. I benefitted profoundly from the sense of trust and affirmation that I knew I would find at each encounter. Examples throughout the collected art works and meeting transcriptions reinforce the importance not only for me, but for the other three members as well, that while we all enjoyed the benefits of intellectual stimulation and improved teaching practice, the strong bond of friendship and trust was the most valued element of the experience.

4.4. Bonding: Becoming ‘Sisters of Inquiry’

Although I deliberately invited participants with whom I already had a professional relationship that was clearly or potentially *simpatico*—women who I knew enjoyed intellectual challenge, who maintained an inquiry stance toward their practice and a critical perspective on the BC education system, who had a background in the arts, and who worked to integrate the arts into their daily practice—I could only *hope* that we would find ourselves to be personally compatible for the kind of collaboration I was proposing. In fact, I was unprepared for the speed at which the group members connected! A feeling of being ‘kindred spirits’ established itself in the very first meeting, and it seemed to take hold like fire in dry grass. Beginning in that very first encounter, everyone was willing to speak very honestly about their own lives and to share their thoughts, joys, fears, and frustrations about teaching—and we seemed equally willing to engage intellectually and to ‘step out’ artistically to try creating poetry, movement, visual art, photographs, or other experimental forms of personal expression. It was as though we were all *hungry* for this kind of community, conversation, and artistic activity. The

other surprise was the longevity of the group: we continued to meet for over three years, until one member took a teaching position in Africa.

One of our collected texts illustrates the high value the participants placed on this feeling of trust and community. One evening near the end of our first year together, when we had been discussing some questions and issues regarding digital technology in our classrooms, I brought up an online application I had recently encountered called *wordle* [www.wordle.net]. No one else had heard of it, so I offered to give a little demonstration. I asked each member to jot down a list of words that described what it meant to them to be part of this group. While they wrote, I typed my own list into a document on my laptop. Then I asked them each to read out their lists; as they spoke I added their words into the document and then pasted the compiled list of words and phrases into the application to create an instant “word cloud”. An interesting feature of the *wordle* application is that—while the words are randomly distributed and positioned—the size of each word in the word cloud is directly related to the frequency of its occurrence in the original document. The result of this little experiment captured a spontaneous illustration of the relative value of the various benefits we were drawing from our collective experience at the time.

1. *Our Collective Experience (Wordle) by Kathy*



In creating the word cloud, the application splits up phrases; for example, on the original list the word ‘perspectives’ occurs as part of ‘enlarged perspectives’ and ‘shared perspectives’. ‘Shared’ was also paired with ‘understanding’—and several of these words also occurred as individual entries, as well. The figure suggested that the key elements of the group experience were intellectual stimulation, enjoyment, and (predominantly) interpersonal connection and support. As a means of gathering and analyzing data, this method is certainly open to question: having the participants publicly read out their lists of words meant I had no way of knowing to what degree they were influenced by each other’s lists; it was quite possible that what they read out was not actually what they wrote down or what they genuinely thought. However, because of the degree of trust that was openly acknowledged in the group, I feel safe interpreting this document as one illustration of the importance of a sense of community in this group. Furthermore, its message was borne out repeatedly throughout our transcribed conversations—most particularly in the individual interviews—and in various aesthetic expressions. Each of us described the importance of creating a space where we felt safe to speak candidly and to share our artistic experiments, where we felt our opinions

were valued, and where we felt free to include perspectives from our non-teaching identities.

I examined our meeting transcriptions for an explanation of what might have facilitated this rapid development of trust and community. One aspect of our experience as teachers—a sense of isolation—appeared to be immediately significant in contributing to our rapid bonding. Three members described feeling a need for more professional interaction with like-minded others—a feeling that is common among teachers and is well documented in educational research (Zembylas, 2003). For Kate, the isolation she felt in teaching was a consequence of “educational structures”:

Kate: We're so isolated and I'm the only person in that room for 5½ hours. I think I'm doing a good job, but maybe I'm not doing a good job... maybe I don't really know... I'm trying but... where do you go to find out? Having the time to sit with other educators and to see that across the board we are all sharing the same struggles... and that we needed to talk and talk and talk about those same struggles and the little victories... 'I know exactly how that is!' It confirmed for me that we need each other desperately and that there's not enough time to talk or to share. We don't have structures in place to really support teachers. That piece was confirmed every time we got together. ...

Dara described a feeling of geographic isolation and how being in our group prompted her to make an effort to link with other staff members both in the staffroom and in her classroom, as well:

Dara: I am at the farthest end of the school—in a corner, kind of isolated—and I make a point of going, now, and sitting with the recess group and sitting at the lunch table when I have those opportunities, and even on my prep of just talking to whoever else has one, too, or connecting and really listening to their story—and finding that we really are the same. All these things are happening, and we're doing it all in isolation. I'm starting to team teach a lot more. Friday I had four different classes in my room—four different teachers were in there with their classes...it was amazing.

Cheryl's isolation was curricular:

Cheryl: It's so easy to feel that you work in isolation. I often feel that because I'm the only dance teacher in the school and the things I'm thinking about—movement—are not what other teachers are thinking about. So I do feel isolated. So having this group gave me a place to come to where other

people heard what I was saying, there was some give and take—I was definitely influenced by what happened in the group... Even though we weren't all dance teachers we were all artists, and we all *appreciated* dance—I would say that about everyone in the group.

Added to the 'normal' isolation of teachers working in separate classrooms, I think each of us felt further isolated by our critical views of many of the practices that other colleagues took for granted. It is difficult to maintain—let alone express—controversial beliefs if you feel you are the only one on your staff. Theorist Michalinos Zembylas has analyzed the way that systemic “structures of feeling” shape a teacher’s emotional responses, both internal and external:

In the United States and England, school teachers teach in contexts that encourage individualism, isolation, a belief in one’s own autonomy, and the investment of personal resources. There exists a significant body of research related to teacher isolation. Teachers learn to internalize and enact roles and norms (for example, emotional rules) assigned to them by the school culture through what are considered ‘appropriate’ expressions and silences. (Zembylas, 2003, p. 119)

Viewed through this lens, teachers’ emotions are implicated in the exercise of power within school cultures.

These rules act as norms that code, rank, and regulate emotional responses in terms of conformity and deviance. ... These rules, interacting with school rituals (presentations, meetings, teaching manuals, speeches, memos), constitute both the teacher-self and teacher emotions. Teachers must perform themselves in line with these familiar identities, or they risk being seen as eccentric, if not outrageous. They need to regulate and control not only their overt habits and morals, but their inner emotions, wishes, and anxieties. (Zembylas, 2003, p. 120)

He has documented the story of a young teacher who tried to teach progressively in a school that favoured tradition and teach-to-the-test. Her enthusiasm (and her pedagogy) was ‘corrected’ by her colleagues’ criticism of her approach, leaving her feeling powerless and inadequate.

The political roots of emotions in education are generally ignored....The normative expectation implicit in these emotional rules was that Catherine should assimilate into predetermined roles and expectations and manager her ‘deviant’ or ‘outlaw’ emotions. Her sense of shame caused

her to remain silent, to feel isolated, and perhaps, most important, to view herself as a 'failure'. She became unsure of her teaching philosophy: Was she doing the 'right' thing to teach science by using inquiry, emphasizing passion and love for the subject, and making connections to other subjects, when her fellow teachers accused her of depriving her students of the opportunity to get good scores on the state test?

(Zembylas, 2003, pp. 122-123)

Each member of our group had experienced the kind of self-questioning and emotional pressure to conform that Zembylas described—many times during our long years of classroom experience. Each of us had at one time or other been required to defend arts-based/multimodal pedagogy to skeptical administrators, colleagues or parents. And we had all experimented with 'alternate' forms of assessment, a particularly troubling element of teaching practice for us. We knew first-hand how resisting institutional demands to "be docile and disciplined" (Zembylas, p. 123) caused feelings of exhaustion, self-doubt, and isolation. No surprise, then, that we were so immediately willing to embrace each other and to create a community in which we all felt safe and supported. In a trusting atmosphere we were able to erase the feelings of isolation, to ask hard questions about our own pedagogy and to see our own attitudes, strengths and weaknesses more clearly. Intuitively, we understood what Zembylas concluded from his observations: "In their everyday teaching practices, teachers take profound personal and professional risks, and they need to adopt resistance and support strategies in order to care for themselves and explore new forms of subjectivity" (Zembylas, p. 123). Both in our conversations and in our aesthetic work, we were doing exactly that: reinforcing each other's critical views and practices and inviting and affirming expressions of ourselves as "subjects with unique capacities worthy of respect" (Zembylas, p. 123).

Another factor that contributed to our sense of community and trust was the setting of our meetings. Enjoying leisurely-paced, self-directed conversations in a comfortable, cozy home setting—with a meal—certainly contributed to and encouraged honest, heartfelt communication and a sense of belonging, of speaking the same language. I found it interesting how significant the element of food became—to the extent that I often seem to have tagged memories of a particular evening to what we ate that night! The tradition of beginning every meeting with a meal was established in our first three meetings on campus—for which I had provided a light meal each time—and

from then on was simply understood as a necessity, whenever we met. Between meetings, there would be enthusiastic exchanges of email correspondence planning collaborative menus or suggesting good restaurants for take-out. After a while the importance we placed on the food planning became a running joke, but through this group's appreciation of and connection to the food I came to realize how effectively a shared meal can serve as a mode of communication. Both Dara and Cheryl commented on food as nourishing more than just the body:

Dara: When we met it was always over food—which was to me nurturing of the mind-body-soul.

Cheryl: We sometimes laugh about food... seeing as every meeting we've ever had centered around a meal... and sharing the production of it... whether we're picking up take-out or cooking from scratch. Food is important... nourishment... as we come together to nourish the body and our minds, fully accepting that we don't want one of those without the other. And accepting that one of those doesn't work without taking care of the other.

Certainly, “settings are not neutral” (Houston, 2008, p. 389), and the warmth and hospitality of Cheryl's big dining table and comfortable living room contributed significantly to our growing intimacy, as did the small size of the group. As Cheryl pointed out, in a small group there is less competition to be heard and less likelihood of power struggles arising.

Cheryl: With a small group, I didn't have to fight for air time—I felt that if I had something to say I could say it. And everyone was respectful enough to ... when you said (*gesture*) ‘I have something...’ they were very supportive and encouraging. I think in our group we shared the power. I don't think anyone was dominant. And I think we came to this experience each wanting that. We didn't want to dominate, and we wanted this shared, communal, collaborative thing. And I think when we talked about increasing the size of the group that was perhaps a concern—that somebody would come in there and just... take over and dominate. So I think we managed to get a pretty power-equal group.

In my initial vision for this group, I had imagined possibly 6 or 7 members, as I knew several other women teachers who I was sure would have been compatible and valuable contributors; however, none had been available to participate in the pilot study, and after that phase was completed and I proposed inviting new members, the prospect of a larger group was not met with enthusiasm. We discussed the challenges of integrating

new people who did not share the history and ‘ways of being’ we had already created, and the consensus was, as Dara put it, “I like it the way it is!”. Initially I felt some disappointment in having to exclude potential members who I was certain would fit in well; however, I also fully agreed with the groups’ observations about the challenges such a change would bring, and I was committed to allowing the group to define itself rather than imposing my own intentions.

Without doubt it is much easier to share power and leadership in a small group compared to a larger one. It is also easier to create an emotionally-safe space to take risks. And we definitely subjected ourselves to some risk-taking activities with regard to both the intimacy of our conversations and our experimentation with various artistic genres.

Dara: There were times when I was driving [to a meeting] thinking “I should ‘call in sick’” (*laughs*) because I suspect I’m going to be doing something I don’t want to be doing—it’s out of my comfort zone...and that’s the whole thing about taking the risk. The unknowing, though, was exciting. And because the trust factor was there, there really wasn’t a reason [for discomfort]. Eventually I got comfortable with just bringing what I had... and I could feel “well, that’s OK” I didn’t have to have the polished product in a short time. And sometimes all the media we used weren’t familiar to me...like the glosa [*a rigid form of poetry we tried out*]... I thought “oh my goodness, I’m so out of my comfort zone here!” but it was amazing what came out... I thought we validated each others’ ideas and I thought it was a safe place to express our beliefs whether they went with the group or not. I don’t think I ever felt that I couldn’t say what I needed to say.

The feeling of excitement that Dara describes was, I believe, shared by all of us—a sense of exhilaration associated with creating a community that we were free to shape to fit our own needs and interests. We had all experienced professional development programs and graduate-level academic work, but we had each found those experiences less than fully satisfying in terms of personal and professional growth. Coming together in this small group seemed to offer possibilities and rewards that had been inaccessible so far. This exhilaration led to a number of creative works that focused not on teaching but on the meaning of ‘finding each other’, of creating a collective identity. Kate described that initial energy:

Kate: I am very interested in this idea of intimacy within the profession. 'Collegiality'—what does that really mean? And 'survival'—how our friendships and our connections really sustain us as teachers. So when we came together I just really felt this [gasp] and it just ignited me. Yeah this is important to me—and finally! Finally I'm here and I have this opportunity to participate in something I have actually all along been hanging onto with little threads... and here it is in a really robust way. It really meant a lot, so that's why it was so resonant for me. And so I gave myself the opportunity to express it in poetry—right at that ignition phase.

Kate's first poem—sent to the group by email a few days after our initial meeting—was the first of three early artistic experiences that proved to be fundamental in creating the deep bond within the group.

Kate's poem arrived as an attachment with an accompanying image. The poem describes a stream winding its way to the ocean and draws on the mythology of Yemaya, a goddess figure in African and Afro-American religions. (Later, Kate responded to our questions about Yemaya, who was unfamiliar to the rest of us. She explained that although her identity varies somewhat in different regions, Yemaya is generally associated with water or the sea and is a mother goddess or patron of women). In Kate's poem, the stream eventually reaching the ocean—"Yemaya's embrace at last"—serves as a metaphor for her own search for community and collaboration with other like-minded 'partners', especially those who could understand the challenges and joys of teaching and of coming together as women.

2. Yemaya's Sisters by Kate

Yemaya's Sisters



meandering
stream gathers into itself
the scent of grass and sodden earth
roots twisted determined
skitter bugs dance
decay
crayfish know their place
cool shadows tumbling.
stream drags
snatches stories told
so then finally and ever after
tales of love and rage and parched dusty
fields
and whiling away an afternoon
clouds like elephants trains and teapots.
stream leaves moments there
eddies tempt
enticing
hypnotic
let go
that story's done
the end
or gives back a long since silent hope
(or fear)
surface smooth and saturated
gasping for breath
at last.
stream finds its way
forgetting that boulder there or sudden
change of plans
comes bearing gifts and tales of wonder
willows weeping
snapturtles star gazing
blossoms swirl and mesmerize
knows the way home
breathes deep
briny currents pull
away to oceans dark and cold
fragrant songs and memories
pirate dreams
mermaidens
kelp forests' drifting rhythms
Yemaya's embrace at last

The stream is personified as seeking a kind of solace or consummation or unification: “meandering”, “gathering”, “letting go”, “gasping for breath”, then eventually “finding its way”, “breathing deep”, surrendering to the pull of “briny currents” and “kelp forests’ drifting rhythms”. The accompanying photograph reinforces the image of the stream seeking a pathway and shaping its own route over time, gathering things, “bearing gifts”, leaving behind traces of its passage. Kate’s sharing of this metaphor provided not only an expression of her own inner life but was embraced by the group as affirmation of a quest with which we could all apparently identify. Kate’s title “Yemaya’s Sisters” immediately became a kind of touchstone for our group identity. Many of our subsequent emails were addressed to “My Sisters”. At our second meeting we discussed the relevance to our own identities of female-archetype figures such as Goddess, Queen, and Crone. Cheryl proposed that for our next (third) meeting we experiment with some improvisational movement activities, and Dara suggested we use Kate’s poem as our starting point.

The second significant contribution to the group bonding occurred during the ensuing week. Cheryl emailed us a poem of her own in which she referenced Yemaya and claimed the identity of ‘crone’ as an expression of creativity and wisdom. She described how—instead of preparing for her classes or working on her thesis—she spent an evening sewing a costume/prop for our proposed movement activity and how the act of creating with cloth felt as though she were releasing a voice that had been silenced. The image that she chose to accompany her poem is a painting of a woman’s face superimposed on a background of winter forest. The wrinkled skin and grey hair indicate advanced age, but her features are beautiful, her eyes are wide, and her hair is thick and luxurious—an image of womanly power. The crescent moon and night sky suggest mystery, and the forest background suggests age and natural cycles. It is a depiction of the Crone as a figure of strength and knowledge.

3. *Crone who* by Cheryl

Crone who...



...sewed my reflection last night...
or did it sew me? As usual, time warped in
the doing..
one of my literacies...
using cloth as text
to visually create an artefact of inquiry
I am ready now to investigate possibilities
for Yemaya' sisters

and in working this woven text to embrace my inner crone
felt the spirit of creation coursing through my veins
bringing joy stirred up by the courage of abandonment
releasing some of the shadows that paralysed my growth
and silenced my voice for many years these were all
impediments but not impossibilities
that I learned to overcome

To hell with all who walk these sainted halls
Who would never be caught dead in crone like state
Not in an eternity of living forever

Crone who by daylight hours
teaches dancing neophyte granddaughters
who only know Keshia and LeToya
and have not yet found Yemaya

Crone who when the sun has set
sews and weaves meaning into cloth
to go dancing with her sisters of inquiry

These two poems—so early in our acquaintance—both testified to and significantly contributed to the rapid development of mutual trust on which we could build our work together. They spoke of things we had all felt but had never voiced—but within this small and rather homogeneous group there seemed to be a space where we could freely express intimate thoughts and feel sure of being understood.

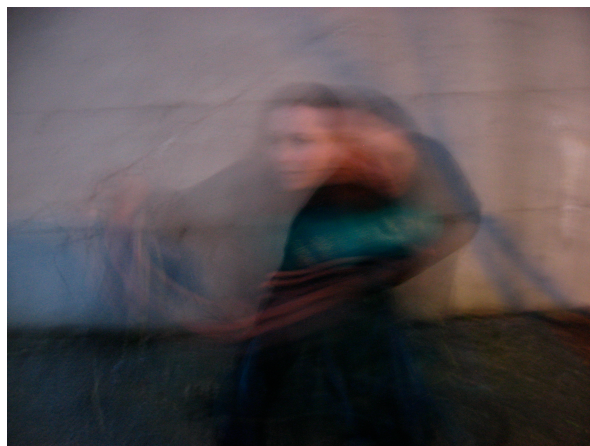
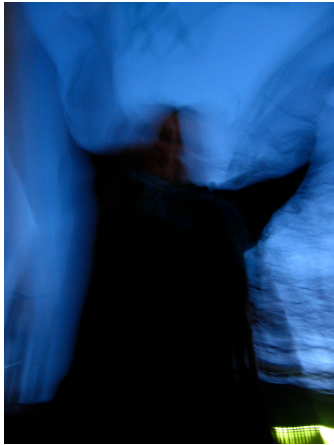
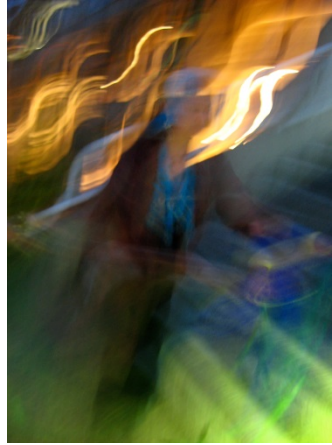
At our third meeting (on the Simon Fraser University campus), we arrived anticipating an opportunity to create some movement together. Although we had not discussed it ahead of time, everyone spontaneously brought or wore special clothes to fit the theme of Kate's poem. For the first hour, we met around a table, discussing Cheryl's poem, especially the use of the Crone archetype, as well as others from traditional mythologies (Maiden, Mother, Queen, LaLoba—the Wild Woman...); the conversation was lively regarding how these archetypes resonated in our own lives. The video footage of this meeting shows noticeably more energy and much more frequent laughter than in the two previous meetings; there is a sense of anticipation and fun. As it was a warm, clear evening we decided to move outside to do our creative movement activity. In a small, enclosed courtyard just outside our meeting room, we took turns taking photographs on Cheryl's camera while we improvised movement sequences and tableaux in response to Kate's "Yemaya's Sisters". On this occasion, it was Kate who felt some trepidation:

Kate: Some of the dance stuff was kind of on my comfort edge—that was really challenging. I think I wanted some kind of warm up, to talk about it, to know what we were going to do, and you were all just 'OK, we're starting, just moooove with the scarf' and I was like.... waaah!. It was scary, but you kind of all pulled me in with your absolute comfort there. So I just had to let go, right?

Kate revealed these feelings months later—at the time, none of us was aware of her nervousness. Like Dara's willingness to risk sharing her poetry and art work, Kate's decision to "just let go" and join in the movement required courage—but her choice also demonstrated the level of trust that was already developing. And, as Dara pointed out, the trust grew each time we had to exercise it. Dancing together was a new experience for us, and dancing outside in a university courtyard was definitely unfamiliar and novel; this proved to be a significant and memorable evening for all of us. The photographs that resulted from this session reveal images of seeking, of caring, of power, of mystery

and of joy. The sun set as we were working, and the change in light produced some interesting photographic effects that we were quite delighted with, upon later viewing.

4. Creating movement together



The experience of creating together seemed to be very significant in strengthening feelings of commitment to the group and in affirming the value of creative embodied expression. Recalling this evening months later, both Dara and Cheryl remembered it as “magical”.

Cheryl: It was very liberating. We were able to kind of let go and just... play. Play with the idea of being people together. And the light was really incredible because it was getting towards evening... It was kind of a magical thing.

Dara: I remember seeing all these students inside in classes with their books, and I thought 'I'm out here dancing!'. And then it got dark and the moon came out, and all the lights came on in the stairwells...and that was just magical to me because we went from a poem to dance to taking photographs. Those photographs were beautiful in the end... so that was magical—a really strong memory for me. And we didn't really know each other, so we had to trust each other at that point, and it was that 'building' that was happening there as well.

This session concluded my pilot study, officially ending any further commitment to the group; however, our first three experiences had been rewarding and enjoyable, and everyone agreed we should continue to meet. It seemed that our shared meals and dinner-time conversation, our frank discussions about teaching, and our experiments in expressing ourselves in various aesthetic forms were creating a surprisingly rapid bond within our little community and a deep level of commitment to our collective work.

We continued to meet, usually at Cheryl's, bringing our creative work to share and discuss, sometimes Cheryl or I would propose an academic article to read and discuss... and I recorded and transcribed all our meetings. Chapters 5 and 6 discuss in detail the various directions our collaboration took us.

Chapter 5.

Reflecting on teaching ‘in a flawed universe’

We came together to think about and talk about teaching, and that certainly took up a significant proportion of the meetings; interestingly, however, teaching received relatively less emphasis in our creative work. An overview of the transcripts and creative work shows that we used the conversations predominantly as opportunities to articulate and analyze our practices as teachers and teacher-inquirers. We discussed the individual inquiries we were each pursuing in our own teaching contexts, focusing on questions, doubts, and wonderings or celebrating successes we saw in ourselves and our students. Our aesthetic expressions, on the other hand, followed the precedent set by Kate’s and Cheryl’s first two poems and were on the whole less analytic and more celebratory: images of beauty, metaphors, archetypes, and concise, multi-layered language expressed deeply personal beliefs and hopes. Surprisingly often these pieces expressed ideas or identities that seemed to have little or no connection to teaching, an observation that prompted me to wonder how and why we so readily accommodated these expressions that an outsider might have considered irrelevant to our stated aim of reflecting on our classroom practice. As I coded and analyzed, I realized that our creative work focused almost entirely on contested identities that we claimed in common—as critical-minded teachers, certainly, but also as artists, arts educators, graduate students, and aging women. It seemed that we *talked* about teaching, but we wrote, painted, photographed, and danced more often about ‘us’. This observation prompted me to examine more closely the ways our creative pieces wove through our conversations, acting sometimes as a catalyst for dialogue and at other times as a response.

Obviously, conversation was fundamental to our reflective practice. Over the years, we had all experienced the intellectual pleasure and professional benefit of discussing educational issues with colleagues; the value of dialogue-with-peers as a

technique for stimulating thinking and transformation is widely supported in teacher education theory and is a mainstay in university education programs. Teacher educator Carol Rodgers and developmental psychologist Katherine Scott (2008) identified a particularly relevant benefit in their survey of successful teacher education programs: “Through describing, storying, and questioning in small groups of trusted colleagues, the self reframes experience and begins to assume the authority of his or her identity instead of ceding it to external forces” (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 748). Although we each taught different age groups and very different curricula, we shared a number of educational concerns in common, and we each brought our own particular angles, observations, and questions to the group. We were not seeking simple solutions to pedagogical challenges—dilemmas about curriculum or impossibly diverse ranges of individual needs in one classroom were obviously far too complex for easy answers. We often gave opinions or asked further questions, but examples of one group member suggesting a particular teaching method or strategy to another were rare. Rather, our conversations were a kind of exchange, a commerce with others who held a similar vision of the aims of teaching and who could listen, identify with, and offer thoughts on our challenges (and triumphs) as we struggled to bring that vision to life in our daily work. Being few in number and having a whole evening in which to explore ideas and problems meant we had time to analyze more fully and respond to each other more thoughtfully than is possible in a university class, a professional development session or a staff room discussion. Kate articulated the way that our conversations helped her:

Kate: In the day there is not the time, the space, the luxury to stop and analyze every single moment so there are just those times when you just kind of get moved along... But in the group we had time to do some of that processing. It gives me cause to reflect that, yeah, there are lots of things I haven't had time to process. ... I think our conversations helped me kind of soothe my own angst. 'Cause I could hear what was going on with a secondary teacher and a university instructor and a kindergarten teacher and I could see 'OK this was not something I'm concocting'... so then I can be with that. But I'm still having to operate within this realm, this universe that is flawed... so I found there was some comfort in that.

Talking, then, was the foundation of our collaboration. Our grappling with issues in teaching was done mostly through conversation; however, three poems and two narratives that dealt explicitly with classroom practice wove through these conversations. Examining these pieces—and their contributions to our discourse—suggested that

limiting our practice to talking alone would have provided us with an impoverished experience compared to the depth of questioning and the new insights that our creative work made available to us.

5.1. Collaborative reflections: How we wrote and talked about teaching

What we talk about, then, is the product of digging down into our values, our sense of self, and our sense of others. An important topic in conversations about teaching is the products of our inner work. This is more challenging than discussions of teaching techniques or impressions of ‘students these days’. Discussions of the products of inner work require impressive degrees of honesty and courage. There is little point in discussing simply what we think people want to hear about teaching when we know that the inner work yields more intricate content....As vulnerable as such work might make us feel, it is absolutely essential work for educators. (Poole, 2012, p. 9).

“Digging down into our values, our sense of self” was exactly what we wanted to do together, and “discussions of the products of inner work” were indeed the catalysts that enriched our conversations about teaching. Talking about teaching is a fragile undertaking: we well knew how easily a conversation could slip into ineffectual griping or superficial generalizations on “students these days”. We had all experienced that type of *anti*-reflective conversation in staff rooms, and we knew we wanted to avoid that pitfall. Writing creatively in a freely-chosen genre encouraged “honesty and courage” in our reflecting, and sharing these writings ensured the vulnerability “absolutely essential” to keeping our thinking and our dialogue on the level of critical questioning and exploration. Our experiences suggest that integrating our artistic work into our discussions supported and enhanced those conversations in three ways.

5.1.1. Getting beyond ‘students these days’: Questioning priorities, exploring dilemmas, affirming identities

Over the three year duration, a recurring theme in our discussions was the constant conflict we felt between the professional expectation on one hand to provide new learning experiences and ‘forward progress’ on required curricula every day and, on the other, a felt need to respond to the immediate emotional and physical stresses that

hindered our students' learning. Both Cheryl and Dara addressed this conflict in short 'day-in-the-life' narrative writings expressing their belief that teachers need to allow students to bring their personal lives and concerns into the classroom, and they need to respond to those concerns—sometimes at the expense of a planned lesson. In her piece, Cheryl referenced Ted Aoki's description of a teacher's conflict between sticking to "curriculum as written" or responding to "curriculum as lived" (Aoki, 1993). The decision to accommodate students' emotional or physical needs in this way is not made merely in empathy or sympathy but is also a pedagogically-motivated choice:

Cheryl: No one can learn when they are preoccupied. They have to be cleared of concerns, ready to take more into the vessel that is already bulging. Despite the existence of prescribed curriculum there are inconsistencies in teaching human beings that make a "living curriculum" (Aoki, 1993) a more natural way of interacting with students and their lived needs. At times like this, I throw the 'lesson plan' out the window, choosing instead to sit on the floor and go around the circle to let everyone let out some of the pressure.

She recounts examples of the stories she hears daily, cataloguing the kinds of stresses that her teenage dance students bring to her class. She paints a background against which she is expected to teach and evaluate 'prescribed learning outcomes':

5. "I can't dance today..." by Cheryl (excerpt 1)

On my way into class, the counsellor catches up with me. We are both walking quickly. The bell has already rung and we are both due to be in other places as we talk. "Elizabeth won't be in class today. We've called her father and he's taking her to Children's Hospital. She has confessed to her P.E. teacher that she is anorexic. In the past five days all she has eaten includes a cup of coffee, a small salad and half an apple. She was unable to run around the gym but kept stumbling and staggering off to the side. We put her in first aid because she looked like she was blacking out, and that's when she admitted what was wrong. She says she's been like this for two years now."

I turn the corner and am met full onslaught by several students all rushing at me.

*"I'm starving. I feel like I'm going to faint if I try to dance today". Did you eat breakfast?
"No... I never eat breakfast. It makes me feel sick to eat first thing in the morning". ...
Annie asks, "What does anaemic mean? My doctor told my mom I'm anaemic". ...*

"I got kicked in soccer last night and can't even walk up and down the stairs".

"I fell in basketball and my wrist is sprained".

"My finger is broken. The doctor says it's a greenstick fracture but it's throbbing and I can't really concentrate. I can't dance today".

"I don't have my dance clothes here because I slept over at my dad's house last night and he drove me to school and I couldn't go home and get my stuff because there wasn't time to get there and back".

"I took my strip home on Friday to get it washed and we didn't get to the laundry all weekend".

I notice that David hasn't been in class for a whole week now. He came out last year in grade 11 declaring that he is gay, and his parents moved to Ontario and wouldn't take him with them. No son of his dad would ever be gay, and he's no longer part of that family. David struggles... although the Ministry has found him a placement for this last grade 12 year. He rarely comes to school... makes poor decisions about eating, what he spends the little money that he gets from the Ministry on, and who he hangs out with. Right now, he has problems saying no to those he should say no to and can't say yes to those he might. In any confrontation I've had with him about coming to school he goes 'limp', passive aggressively silent and limp. He's lost his voice about himself and I worry about him a lot. When he's on, he's great, but small things can set him off. That's when he usually disappears.

Clearly, Cheryl's students see her as someone they can trust with details of their private lives, whether profound or temporary and superficial. But her willingness to attend to their needs and accommodate them where possible takes a toll on her personally.

6. "I can't dance today..." by Cheryl (excerpt 2)

My head is swirling with details. Each student has so many issues and concerns and I have 210 individual cases of concerns. I can't think straight...The interruptions piling upon the interruptions piled upon my head are making me dizzy.... It's as though each confession has piled up inside the container that is my own body and I have

become a conglomeration of their needs. Teach??? Now... right this minute... on demand... to expectation... to kids who are sick, stressed, sore, anorexic, emotionally unstable, sleepy, starving, injured, and anaemic? It's almost the end of term and the daily expectation is that I will just repress all of these data bytes and 'teach' something new and fresh and inspiring, almost in a state of denial about what my students are dealing with.

Writing this piece and sharing it with the group was both catharsis and resistance. We discussed the stress of choosing between 'moving students forward' with a planned lesson and responding to the kind of immediate and pressing student needs Cheryl described. We noted the exhausting frequency of having to make that choice—in some classrooms it is a minute-by-minute decision. *What is the source of the relentless pressure to stick to the schedule or to 'meet learning goals'? Since it is often not possible to do both, which is a teacher's more pressing moral obligation: to accommodate those students whose needs will prevent them from learning in this moment? Or to carry on with a lesson that will serve those students who are ready to learn and progress?* Cheryl's piece articulated her belief in the rightness of putting relationships and human concerns above curriculum when the need seems great. Our reception of her reading and our subsequent discussion fulfilled a function that recurs throughout the conversation transcripts: validating her belief, supporting her choice in the face of a difficult pedagogical conflict, and affirming her identity as a responsible and caring teacher.

Coping with what feels like an "onslaught" of needs and interruptions prompted Dara to write an account of the first thirty-four minutes of a typical Monday morning. She found humour in the unpredictable nature of teaching—kindergarten, especially—but included a hint of the same worries that Cheryl had expressed about a child who is not 'fitting in'. Dara's piece also depicted in a light-hearted way the conflict between 'getting on with the plan' and accommodating her students' immediate needs.

7. Dara's Day Book: Monday, Nov. 21, 2011

Objective for morning: to teach actions to an upcoming Concert song, as requested on Friday by the music teacher, so she can teach the song later today. We only have the music teacher one half hour a week. Requirements: All 18 students

- 8:40 Bell rings- 12 out of 18 students enter room. Not enough students to cover requirement. Abandon objective? No, teach to the 12 students.
- 8:43 All 12 students are in but one. He is sitting on his knees in the rain. Mom can't get him to walk in. He enters the room on his knees. Mom can't get him to take off his coat. She tells me, "Good luck with him!" She leaves him in the cloakroom and leaves the classroom.
- 8:45 I ask him to hang up his coat and to join us at the carpet. He does in his soaking wet pants.
- 8:50 I start to take attendance -knock on door—student arrives late.
- 8:53 Almost done attendance when a girl jumps up and screams that she has lost her tooth. Her mouth is bleeding.
- 8:54 Girl still screaming while there is another knock on door. Another student arrives late.
- 8:57 Wrap up tooth and girl's mouth stops bleeding. Girl is told to put her tooth in her backpack to take home.
- 9:00 She yells, "Can someone help me find my tooth? I dropped it somewhere." Whole class volunteers.
- 9:03 Find tooth. Tuck it safely in her backpack.
- 9:05 Finally send attendance to the office.
- 9:06 Class hears a knock. We think it is the door. I answer the door. Two parents, who are avoiding the rain, are chatting under the overhang outside my classroom. They are not my students' parents. They are accidently bumping the window with an umbrella. They apologize. I imagine for one second about not having anything else to do but stand outside someone's class and chat.
- 9:08 Abandon Concert objective. Decide to celebrate the lost tooth. Discuss teeth. Start to read, *I Lost My Tooth_book*.
- 9:12 Boy stands up and vomits.
- 9:14 Abandon song, story and classroom.
- Only five hours and thirty-one minutes to go.

This piece, like Cheryl's, served both as catharsis and as a self-depiction expressing clear values: those of a competent, experienced, well-prepared, and flexible teacher. She reveals that she has curricular activities ready to shift gears spontaneously and apparently seamlessly from music to 'teeth'. She copes calmly and practically with the worrisome boy, the multiple interruptions, and the lost tooth. Underlying this image, however, is a message: 'There may be limits on how much improvisation and

accommodation even an experienced and competent teacher can be expected to exercise’—a message she trusted that her audience would receive with understanding and empathy.

Dara’s assumption was correct: it was very easy for each of us in the group to identify with the situations and feelings that she and Cheryl described in their narratives—we had all coped with the stress of trying to make the best decision under seemingly impossible conditions. Both Cheryl and Dara wrote their pieces ‘for us’, knowing that we would understand and empathize with each other’s need to respond to students’ personal circumstances and be able to adjust a lesson plan on a moment’s notice. Dara’s light-hearted portrait of her morning is also an example of the kind of ‘battlefield humour’ that is very common in teacher discourse, or indeed in the discourses of any profession or occupation—the practice of treating genuine frustrations or concerns facetiously among colleagues. It is a reality of teaching in a public school that any stretch of thirty-four minutes of a planned lesson is vulnerable to multiple interruptions, distractions, detours or even deliberate sabotage, just as it is a reality that most classrooms include at least one student whose behaviour is troubling on some level. Teachers cope with these conditions differently, but no one is exempt—all teachers would recognize the concern and the frustration behind Dara’s consciously flippant tone. Her closing lines “Abandon song, story and classroom. Only five hours and thirty-one minutes to go.” were written in jest—but not entirely. Dara shared her story with us knowing she could express what would be taboo in a more public context—she knew we would not take her last sentiment literally. The intimacy of the group allowed us all occasionally to vent our frustrations without being misunderstood.

Writing and sharing this piece in the form that Dara chose produced a very different effect than if Dara had recounted her story verbally. If she had simply *told* us about her difficult Monday morning, we would have received it as ‘venting’: we would have appreciated the humour, empathized and sympathized with her frustration, and then most likely would have moved on to other topics. In fact, we usually shared ‘battlefield’ stories during dinner, before the ‘serious’ conversations started. Because this story was written down, it became a concrete ‘object’ for appreciation and reflection—something to be considered, discussed, remembered, and referred back to in later conversations. As a spoken utterance, delivered in the first-person, in the casual

register that we typically used in our group, it would have included all the same details as the written version, but it would not have communicated the sense of Dara observing herself and her students from a third-person viewpoint—an element that was key in creating the gentle humour and keeping the account from becoming mere griping. I think the ‘day book’ form was also significant. Had she written in informal expository prose, the typical genre for reflective writing, the effect would have been similar to a first-person verbal account, lacking the sense of irony set up by the strict, time-conscious, day-plan format and the chaotic unfolding of events. The fact that Dara’s story was written, and the form she chose to write in, gave her story a kind of permanence and stature in the discourse and gave the group an opportunity to support the decisions Dara made, validate her observations, and affirm the identity she depicted in a way that would not have happened if her story had been delivered verbally. So even pieces such as these that were written largely to ‘vent’ helped to invigorate our conversations and keep them on the level of recognizing dilemmas and exploring choices, identities and values. Woodcock et al., (2004) acknowledge the power of this process:

As we reflect by writing and speaking with others, we are led to question and revisit our teaching from different perspectives...We not only learn from others—we learn from ourselves by talking and interacting with others. When the process of reflection involves others, we enhance our ability to determine and to shape our own educational philosophies, instruction, and responsibilities to students’ growth. (Woodcock, Lasonde & Rutten, 2004, pp. 57-58).

5.1.2. Articulating the unspoken

Kate’s poem “Heretic” was an explicit expression of a teacher’s doubts and questions dealing with the consequences of teaching from a critical perspective. This poem was inspired by feelings Kate experienced on reading her students’ self-evaluations at the end of an intense term. Teaching a split Grade 4-5 class at the time, she had involved her students in a number of self-reflective activities using visual art, video and writing to analyze their own strengths, their own learning preferences and interests, and to articulate their dreams and goals for both the upcoming term and the more distant future. At our meeting she shared passages of the video with us and read out loud some of her students’ reflective writing. The video record reveals the extent to which we were deeply moved and impressed by these kids’ apparent self-knowledge

and ability to articulate their learning needs and their dreams. That night (among others) we discussed the conflict between our desire to find ways to empower our students to direct their own learning and the ways that standard school practices often limit or direct a child's learning pathway, particularly in the so-called 'academic' subjects. After that intense conversation, writing "Heretic" was Kate's way of consolidating her feelings and thoughts into a single coherent expression.

8. *Heretic* by Kate

I am a heretic.
Claiming some other constructed universe.
Speaking out in fits and bursts.
Declaring truths and lies my mother told me.
In this other world, you are the Sun
Flaring and reaching far into the vastness of your life.
And I, wobbling on my axis, spiral and spin.

I am a heretic.
You, my captive audience.
Innocent.
Open.
I tell stories. You laugh.
I beckon. You come.
I rage. You follow.
In other times, I might be brave, emboldened by your steps behind.
In quiet moments, yes.
But fear dogs me.
Galileo, brilliant star gazer, locked away and blind.
I am just a teacher. Long division and topic sentences.
Wash your hands and line up for gym.
Term 2 Goals. Reading journals.
I am just a teacher.

In this other world you are the Sun. Not I. Not your father, your mother
Not some faceless institute holding the gaze of many who will squint at
your brilliance
until they see nothing.
Until it all fits into the master plan and you the Sun, are extinguished.

I am a heretic.
Speaking other worlds, painting other skies
My calculations aren't exact
My formulas, imperfect
but one by one, the stars lined up and behold
A constellation so true and clear
you.

Kate's reading of this poem at our next meeting initiated a conversation that would not otherwise have taken place. We readily understood her joy and wonder in her students' unfolding individuality, each one "a constellation so true and clear", and we connected those emotions to her previous reading of their insightful self-assessment reflections. But Kate gave us a new angle in expressing her sense of the frightening responsibility of a teacher whose own critical perspective positions her as a "heretic" in relation to the established "long division and topic sentences" expectations of schooling. Teaching kids to become 'independent thinkers' is a common theme in curricular documents, professional development goals, and in everyday teacher discourse—as a goal it is rarely questioned in practice. Kate's poem, however, points out the complexity of "speaking other worlds, painting other skies". As one of the functions of schooling is socialization—that is, to prepare children and youth for appropriate participation in society—classroom practice often tends to promote conformity within and accommodation to the status quo. Kate's poem raised the question: what is the responsibility of a critical-minded teacher participating in what is, from one perspective, a "faceless institute" with a limited tolerance for individuality and diversity? If—at least on one level—"institutional schooling is a ruse or a veneer for a deeper intention, that being the production of a standardized and benign citizenry" (Gitlin, 2008), to teach children to imagine other worlds and to question the status quo can be seen as a subversive, "heretical" act. We reiterated our commitment to leading our students to see beyond their immediate world and supporting them to "flare and reach far into the vastness", but we also talked about how introducing or inculcating a critical perspective might cause some students to shift away from their parents' values and create a rift in families. I described Megan Boler's book *Democratic Dialogue: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence* (2005), especially the chapter by Ann Berlak in which she recounts her own anti-oppressive teaching experiences and her belief that the only way to shake her white university students out of racist complacency was by creating highly emotionally-charged debates which left some students traumatized. *Can causing one's students (especially children) emotional pain be justifiable? Sometimes? Never? How does a teacher square that with the obligation to nurture her students? Which counts more: a teacher's social role or her private relationship with individual kids? Does the need to expose and challenge oppressive social ideologies justify persuading students to adopt values that will cause them to break with their families?* We had to acknowledge that these were

moral questions with no single, simple answers. That evening we spent a long time engaged in the kind of reflection often referred to as ‘critical reflection’ (Brookfield, 1995; Larrivee, 2000; Ottesen, 2007; Zeichner, 1994) in the sense that it “involves the conscious consideration of the moral and ethical implications and consequences of classroom practices on students” (Larrivee, 2000, p. 294). The video footage revealed a conversational tone that was noticeably more serious than sometimes and was punctuated by thoughtful pauses. Kate’s poem articulated for all of us one of the difficulties of maintaining a critical stance within the school system and problematized our identities as critical-minded teachers. We each described in turn our own moments of joy seeing students discover their own powers and take charge of their own learning, and we also shared the doubts and fears that arise when introducing critical perspectives or facts that contradict established social beliefs. For me, personally, Kate’s poem gave voice to and clarified feelings and questions that I recognized but had not fully articulated or analyzed.

5.1.3. Embracing figurative language

Regularly sharing our creative writing or image-based reflections about teaching kept our conversations on a level of questioning or “digging deep”, sometimes introducing perspectives we might otherwise not have discussed. I believe this interweaving of art work and discussion also opened us up to new insights by inviting more figurative language and analogic thinking into our conversations.

After “Yemaya’s Sisters”, Kate’s next poem introduced us to another female archetype: “pack” is a vivid expression of the deeply emotional and physical stresses that a teacher may undergo on any given day as well as the healing power of a trusting collegial relationship.

9. *pack* by Kate

ouch
she said, clenched and grimacing
I know that sting
caught in my throat threatening hot tears
or
fuck
I put my hand on her hot back
the sharp scent of fury fresh and damp on her skin
what now
rage
an angry tirade
self deprecating rant dismissing labour, love, longing
maybe deflection
busy eyes and hands betray
this that those papers
I know that trick
or worse
resignation
little death
watching faith dissolve before my eyes
battle worn and lonely
how has it come to this
who stands for this woman
and champions her passions
collecting brittle bones and singing Laloba's song
flesh fur breath
gathering self to self she looks into my eyes
I see her
known and knowing
desert winds shift
she straightens
laughing



In this intensely private, emotionally charged moment, one teacher's willingness and ability to listen and care deeply provides the support that drags the other back from the brink of a "little death": self-blame, frustration and despair. The power of profound understanding and empathy—"I know that sting", "I know that trick"—passes between them—"gathering self to self she looks into my eyes/ I see her/ known and knowing"—and re-ignites the courage to go back into the classroom and carry on. It is important that the narrator in this poem says nothing; the healing power comes with a single touch and her complete, fully embodied attention. In this poem Kate described an actual

incident in her workday—a slice of teaching reality—but she also used it to clarify and express an important value that had been discussed in a recent meeting. Writing poetry or creating a visual art piece was an essential part of her reflective process:

Kate: It's an opportunity for me to really look inward and see what's happening for me in my educator world and to find new and interesting ways to communicate that or to share it and to see it. Always looking for a way to metaphorically place that. How can I take what we're talking about right now and see that with new eyes. Not necessarily philosophically or academically but have a *visual* expression of what we're trying to articulate with each other. Trying to get an image for myself. I wanted to find that image for us. That's what I was doing most of the time...I wanted to find those elements... I would come home, or on the way home, and think: what was that really about? What were we really trying to say? What was the nut of that?

Thinking through a meeting in poetry allowed Kate to capture complex and layered meanings from our collaboration. For example, “pack” expresses not only the intense physical and emotional reaction of a teacher to a difficult moment in her day and the healing power of deep empathy from a colleague; it further represents the high value that Kate personally placed on finding that degree of collegial intimacy, and her belief that such a relationship draws on an ancient, innate, communal feminine energy. Her reference to LaLoba, as she later explained, came from a folk tradition known in Europe and North America. LaLoba, Wolf Woman, gathers the bones of desert animals, especially wolves. When she has assembled a complete skeleton she sings over the bones until they begin to acquire flesh, then fur, then breath. Eventually the power of her singing brings the wolf fully to life, and it leaps up and runs free. Somewhere in its flight, the wolf is touched by a natural force—water, sunlight, or moonlight—and is transformed into a laughing woman who runs into the wilderness. The allusion to LaLoba in Kate’s poem, and the accompanying photograph, represent a world of meaning when connected to an image of two women teachers, and it represents as well Kate’s sense of the connection that was forming in our group as we shared our ‘battlefield’ stories, our concerns, and our hopes in the ‘flawed universe’ of teaching.

The use of archetypes, metaphors, and other tropes in writings and images such as Kate created in “pack” created a hospitable space for non-literal thinking in our conversations. I am convinced that embracing metaphors and figurative language deepened our conversations: “A metaphor not only involves a reorientation of

consciousness, it also enables us to cross divides, to make connections between ourselves and others and to look through other eyes” (Greene, 1997, p. 391). One particular metaphor found its way into our writing and our discussions so often and so meaningfully that it became a conscious reference point. This was the idea of ‘flow’, which recurred in various representations throughout our collected texts.

Initially we used the word ‘flow’ to represent a desirable quality in teaching: ideally, we want curriculum and learning experiences to ‘flow’ organically, to make sense to our students. We want our students’ day to unfold smoothly from one activity and one insight to the next—in spite of the frequent interruptions to which the most carefully planned lessons are subjected. In this pedagogical sense, ‘flow’ also stood for the teacher’s need to observe and assess the state of a class moment by moment, make instant decisions and respond to individuals while maintaining a sense of community within the class as a whole.

Kathy: Creating that kind of flow in teaching is an art, a dance—you choreograph your part and the steps of your students, but you constantly improvise to accommodate those unexpected moves from within the group or sudden interruptions from off-stage. A good teacher is like a dancer, keeping it all flowing and making it look effortless.

This use of the word shared some qualities with the term as used by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990) to describe a psychological state of being fully immersed ‘in the moment’, a type of total engagement in which a person’s skills and the challenges of the task at hand are in perfect balance, and each moment or action seems to unfold seamlessly and inevitably from the previous one. Our references to ‘flow’ in teaching addressed an apparent gap in scholarly work on teaching and teacher education. Descriptions of the flow of energy in a classroom or the psychological state of a teacher in the midst of peak performance are rare. In one exceptional example, Avraham Cohen (2012), writing from a Daoist perspective, used the term metaphorically, much as we did:

Daoist pedagogy provides a view of the overall flow and nature of the classroom. This flow is within each individual, within the class as a whole, and is connected to the overall flow of the world and the ineffable. The teacher is the leader and his or her capacity to be aware of and connect with this flow will have a crucial effect on the creation of the classroom atmosphere and experience (Cohen, 2012a, p. 25).

For us, as for Cohen, the idea of ‘flow’ came to mean more than just the experience of a teacher or the energy in a classroom; this metaphorical thread runs through our conversations and creations representing several different aspects of our experiences as teachers, inquirers and women. It began with Kate’s poem depicting the stream and the connection with the water goddess, Yemaya. Water served as a metaphor for women’s way of working: flowing around obstacles, adapting, wearing away restrictive ‘banks’, meandering—moving in non-linear ways—and ‘gathering’ as it goes. In five poems and several images, flow also referred to time and the impermanent, cyclical nature of womanhood: blood/menstruation; transitions through seasons and stages...child-maiden-mother-queen-crone. As a movement specialist, Cheryl identified flow as a kinaesthetic need, a movement of energy that is sadly lacking in our daily lives:

Cheryl: When Laban analyzed movement he made this distinction with flow, that there is sharp/sudden and there is smooth/sustained... and I think we’re out of balance as a society. Lots of people like to sit and watch hockey games where it’s percussive, sharp, sudden...but in terms of human movement we need balance, we need flow in our lives, and we don’t often have flowing movements. We don’t really do tai chi, we stay away from meditation or yoga unless we’re in a mindful practice...so, I think there’s a search for a feeling of flow in our lives.

And finally, we employed it as a metaphor for the way the narrative of a life unfolds. ‘Flow’ gave us a meaningful way not only to talk about teaching but to communicate, analyze, and comprehend those moments when the stream of life changed direction sharply or divided around a boulder: unanticipated, unwelcome interruptions including job changes, children in crisis, deaths of parents or other family members... Or those often frightening, even traumatic, but sometimes joyful moments when changes are made by choice: completing a degree, leading a staff initiative for change, committing to marriage, reaching a milestone such as retirement... The metaphor of ‘flow’ wove through our conversations and artwork in a way that deepened our group bond—which, in turn, created a space for honest and courageous reflection.

5.2. Summary of reflections on teaching

After analyzing our conversations and poems about teaching, I concluded that our creative pieces had made distinct contributions to our dialogue about teaching.

Dara's and Cheryl's day-in-the-life narratives had strengthened our bonds of understanding and empathy and expressed frustrations and fears in a way that helped us to analyze our own strengths and motives as teachers and to reinforce our values and identities. Kate's poem "Heretic" raised an important question about our shared critical vision and prompted a conversation that might not otherwise have happened. Her poem "pack" depicted a teacher's need for shared understanding and support in the 'flawed universe' of teaching and introduced vivid, archetypal images that became foundational in our group identity and discourse. Had we met and only shared the conversations (and dinner), as pleasant as those evenings were, I do not believe the bonding process would have occurred as rapidly; nor would the conversations have been as deep. As Kate expressed it:

Kate: I could meet with another set of educators and be quite content and happy with the conversations because I think they are really, really valuable for me. They did solidify some of my ideas—validate me, push me along in my own thinking. So in and of themselves they're really, really valuable, but I think because we started with this idea, this creative element: "How can we take this piece? Where can we go with it?" ... that adds a whole other level to it.

Our use of poetry and other artistic expressions both depended on *and* contributed toward maintaining a sense of safety and trust that supported deeper questioning, more intimate self-revelation and brought out ideas that would otherwise have remained unexpressed.

I then turned to the creative work that was not specifically about school experiences to ask how these pieces contributed to our reflections on teaching. *How—or what—did sharing poems, photographs, or collages about growing old, being women, being artists or being in a 'study group' contribute to our professional reflective practice?*

Chapter 6.

Avoiding ‘the downward draft of academia’: Creating our own reflective discourse

As I progressed into the next phase of analysis, I realized that all of the documents I collected over the three years, whether ‘dialogic’ or ‘aesthetic’, whether explicitly related to teaching or not, had contributed toward establishing a collaborative reflective practice that ‘felt right’. We were used to discussing teaching in contexts over which we had no control—where we were positioned as ‘graduate students’ or ‘teachers needing to upgrade classroom skills’, and we had little or no choice regarding the physical setting, the time span, or the content of the learning. Looking closely at our ‘non-teaching’ texts made me realize that at the same time as we were reflecting on our teaching we were engaged in defining *how* we wanted to do that.

6.1. Beyond ‘Pro-D’: Attractions of academic study

We came together bringing our previous experiences of two very different models of educational discourse: professional development programs offered to teachers in the field and university-based teacher education programs. In collaborating to define our own form of reflective practice, we were strongly influenced by the latter and almost not at all by the former. The professional development programs we had experienced were consistently oriented toward solving or preventing ‘problems’ or ‘improving results’ and did not meet our needs. These programs were useful in directing attention to new approaches or areas of concern, but they were rarely deeply reflective. We were seeking a kind of inquiry that would help us to uncover “what values and assumptions support the actions we take...questions of intellect and ethical reasoning where [we] struggle with issues of interpretation within a socio-educational context” (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 184). We wanted to engage in the kind of dialogue that would help us to

“account for social, political, and economic contradictions in our pedagogical efforts to confront and change the world, to become transformative teachers” (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 184). The usual professional development sessions available on a designated ‘pro-d day’ did not offer the kind of opportunity we were seeking. The following list of workshop titles is an excerpt from the professional development offerings for elementary teachers in a Lower Mainland school district for a professional development day in 2013:

- Build Your Own Classroom Website—Getting Started
- Build Your Own Classroom Website—Beyond the Basics
- Smartboards for Beginners
- Math Strategies for Grades 1-2
- Leaps and Bounds: Math Intervention Program Training Grades 3-4
- Mastering Multiplication Grades 3-5
- Effective Literacy Learning in Grades K-2
- Closing the Literacy Gap by Third Grade
- Comprehension From the Ground Up: First Best Practice for All Students
- Social Media in the Workplace
- Moving and Grooving to the ABCs
- Raising Financially Fit Kids
- Tomorrow’s Sustainability Solutions Today
- Making Room for Everybody: Creating a Culture of Inclusion
- Nurturing Global Citizenship by Understanding World Water Issues K-8
- Working With the Residential School Kit “100 Years of Loss”
- Integrating Aboriginal Literature into the K-3 Classroom
- Understanding and Responding to Self-Harm Behaviour²

The titles demonstrate the technical and pragmatic orientation of typical ‘pro-d’—an approach that is sometimes seen as ‘deficit training’ (Troen & Boles, 2008). These sessions are generally two to five hours long and are consistently focused on the ‘how’ of teaching: how to do it better. It is unlikely, for example, that in a session such as “Smartboards for Beginners” any time would be given to weighing the pros and cons of

² From “Shared Learning Conference 2013” Professional Development Workshops newsletter <http://sharedlearningconference.com/workshops-listed-by-session>

technology in education or whether Smartboards are a pedagogically-wise choice for all classrooms. Although philosophical or critical conversation was not unheard of in some pro-d settings, it had formed a tiny proportion in our own experiences. Since seeking new teaching strategies or resources or solving classroom problems did not represent our goals at all, our search for professional growth had led each of us toward university programs.

On the other hand, our experiences of university teacher education had definitely provided us with opportunities for and models of reflection, many of which had been rich, engaging and satisfying. In our various graduate programs, for example, we had explored questions about the nature of 'art', had analyzed our own relationship to the arts, and had compared ways the arts are taught around the world. As well as discovering or developing new approaches to classroom practice, we had explored our core beliefs about education and reflected on how closely our pedagogy aligned with those beliefs. Scattered through the transcripts are comments expressing an appreciation of certain aspects of our academic experiences:

Cheryl: I like that I think more critically than I did before and I have a wider perspective... My children were raised, and I was ready to move on in the world, improve my salary by getting an M.A. degree. What I hadn't bargained for was how wonderful the 'education' part was. I found myself understanding issues we discussed and having my own ideas about what education should be and indeed could be, particularly in my own realm of dance education and arts education.

Dara: I don't mind doing the work or research—I like that. ... When you're out of your element, you're not comfortable, that's when the really good stuff comes out. You push your boundaries, and you just get stronger and stronger.

Kathy: I'm used to a level of conversation now that I don't find in schools—I value that a lot...and I miss it when I go to staff rooms, when I'm travelling around to my students' schools... and the level of conversation there... nobody wants to talk about pedagogy...that word is completely out of place there.

All of us had many years of teaching experience, had weathered numerous educational trends that had come and gone in the field, and we had established clear (but not ossified) principles for our own pedagogy. We recognized that there were many

contradictions, dilemmas, and problems we could not solve—our interest was in exploring ways to address those challenging conditions and consolidating our own positions on them, particularly with others who shared our interest in involving students in artistic practices. We were seeking “a higher level of understanding of particular aspects of our classrooms, of education in general” [Kincheloe, 2003, p. 174]. These were the attributes of academic culture that we valued and wanted to retain or replicate. However, as our increasing intimacy came to reveal, each of us had also felt some dissatisfaction with other aspects of academic discourse during our graduate student experiences.

6.2. Discontent with academic study

Our meeting transcripts reveal several qualities of academic discourse that we found less than satisfying—issues of power and exclusivity, particularly in relation to identity, epistemology and self-expression. Cheryl, well into her doctoral program with the longest experience of graduate work in the group, had the most to say. Her concerns centred around perceived inequities of gender, power, and identity.

Cheryl: In the academy and in mandated course work, I have often felt silenced. Many times I have sat through traditional course work and I have not said anything because I did not feel it was my place to say anything. I did not feel that my experience as a woman was validated in that course work. And many times I sat and listened to people dominate the conversation with no care or concern for anyone else in the room beyond their own personal experience. And my experience in my lifetime has been as a woman, as a mother, as an artist, as a teacher... This is my experience, this is who I am, and if this is not validated or understood or supported or encouraged or *invited* ... I feel silenced. I met many men who loved the sound of their own voices. I felt shy and uninformed to assert myself in large group conversations, felt much more at home in small-group situations where we all took turns and shared the discussion. I felt uncomfortable when one or two people were competing to dominate the discussion. I simply didn't want to compete... didn't want to make power plays for the sake of it. I tend to withdraw when power-hungry people begin dominating discussions.

Cheryl's wish to keep our group small was directly related to her concern for equal 'air time', a respectful and 'safe' climate, and attentive responses—in direct contrast to her graduate-study experiences.

For all of us, the privileging of theoretical knowledge over other forms of knowledge was a major source of discontent in our university experiences. It did not escape our notice that scholarly literature refers to teachers as ‘practitioners’ while researchers are ‘researchers’ or ‘theorists’, as though researching and theorizing are not practices. Obviously there is a syntactic need to distinguish between the groups, but this particular distinction carries a connotation of hierarchy: the “high hard ground” of theory versus the “swampy lowlands” of practice (Schön, 1995). In spite of the fact that we were students in the Faculty of *Education*, we found that being knowledgeable about and skilled in teaching was dismissed by some academics in our experience.

Cheryl: Though I’m in the Faculty of Education—and I’m there because I *am* a teacher—that has often been looked down upon. There’s a strength to being a teacher in Education—what you are experiencing is really valid and important and it’s your reason for being there—but once you go into course work and you try to ‘speak the speak’ it’s a whole different thing.

By and large, we had found our Masters programs to be generally hospitable toward our integration of “craft knowledge” (Grimmett & MacKinnon, 1992) with theoretical knowledge; however, Cheryl and I felt a profound difference at the doctoral level. We had both met many students in doctoral programs who were becoming experts in educational theory but who had never taught a class, ever. Understanding pedagogy—or being good at it—is not a necessary requirement for a graduate level credential. The disinterest in teaching demonstrated by some of our professors is apparently neither illogical nor rare (Murray & Aymer, 2009). Although many universities define a faculty member’s role as an equal commitment to research, teaching, and service to the community, it is generally understood (Butterwick, Dawson & Munro, 2007; Murray & Aymer, 2009) that career advancement really depends on “being part of the research club, with its link to the establishment of the title Expert” (Gitlin, 2008, p. 641): securing generous grants, recognition for significant research, and numerous or prestigious publications and presentations. Even in a Faculty of Education, there may be no *material* reward for excellent teaching (Murray & Aymer, 2009). To do it well, teaching demands huge reserves of energy, imagination, and time; we could understand why some professors felt frustrated with ‘having to teach’ when what they loved to do and what they felt most competent in was research. But it was nevertheless disappointing to feel that our perspectives and skills as teachers were devalued.

We also found that hierarchical valuing of theorizing and research skills over other abilities and knowledges extended to domains beyond pedagogy. Being an artist, a mother, a successful entrepreneur, an elite athlete, or a gourmet cook—and the various competencies those identities entailed—had little relevance in the context of our doctoral programs. Those identities were received as ‘interesting’, as giving a sense of inclusiveness to the programs—and both Cheryl and I did have a few professors who specifically invited our teaching experiences and perspectives into the classroom dialogue; but more commonly we felt as though we were expected to shed those identities on our ‘upward’ path toward becoming a scholar.

Cheryl: I think I felt excluded from academic circles because my experience was so practical. I hadn’t questioned [*the academic set of values*]. I thought of myself as ‘less than’...and felt that I didn’t ‘fit in’. But I raised two children to adults and taught school for thirty-four years. This ‘university of lived experience’ leaves me with instinctual understandings about education and about life. I understand issues of power, dominance, equality, collaboration, collegial ways of working together and basic self-esteem and its importance in performance.

We wondered why we felt pressured to exclude our multiple identities and the wisdom acquired through a broad range of lived experience when what we wanted to do, and what seemed to make sense, was to integrate our various ‘practical’ skills and knowledges with theoretical understandings and research practices. As Cheryl pointed out, to maintain a teaching career and pursue graduate studies required enormous commitment and determination: “Sometimes I get asked, ‘How can you do a degree and work full time at the same time?’ And that’s a very good question! (*ironic smile/laugh*). Because I’m still wondering how I ever did that for 12 years—do this graduate work and work full time at the same time”. The systemic structure of our doctoral programs discouraged students from trying to pursue other time- or energy-consuming interests or commitments. Daytime classes and heavy assignment schedules sent the message that to be considered worthy of the identity of ‘scholar’ required an exclusive commitment to academic performance. Decades ago, feminist Adrienne Rich acknowledged “the personal division, endless improvising, and...energy expended” by women attempting to juggle family and work, resulting in forestalled or abandoned careers or further education (Rich, 1979, p. 147). “The notion of the ‘full-time’ student has penalized both women and the poor. The student with a full-time job and a full-time academic program is

obviously more handicapped than the student who can afford to go to college without working” (p. 150). Indeed, rather than being recognized for the qualities of determination, stamina, and commitment we exercised in not giving up on graduate school, I was told by one of my professors that she felt it was a mistake to allow working teachers into the program. Although both Cheryl and I found our doctoral programs to be stimulating, challenging and rewarding in many ways, we did not find them entirely hospitable.

One of our group conversations about our experiences as university students resulted in a poem. Because of our common interest in poetry, I had brought to the group an intriguing poetic form I had recently encountered for the first time: a *glosa*, a form that originated in medieval Spain and which has a very tight structure. A *glosa* begins with a quotation of four lines from another poet and then expands or interprets these lines in four stanzas of ten lines each. The four quoted lines must consecutively be used as the closing lines of each of the four stanzas. Kate and Cheryl enthusiastically suggested we should each write one; Dara and I were somewhat doubtful, but we all agreed to make an attempt. To this point, in spite of our many and intense conversations about teaching, none of our poetry had taken up that theme, so I decided to set myself that challenge for my *glosa*. It took a long time to compose, and I am still revising it, but since I had only written three or four poems in my life at that point, simply managing to fulfil the strict formal requirements felt like an accomplishment. The opening four-line text is taken from “The Swimmer’s Moment” by Canadian poet Margaret Avison (1973).

10. *If you would teach...* by Kathy

*For everyone
The swimmer's moment at the whirlpool comes
But many at that moment will not say
"This is the whirlpool, then."*

Do not brave this river unprepared.
First, study and observe—learn the river’s hazards and great beauty.
Then, the daily regimen:
Strengthen flabby commitments until your will is lean and firm.
Tone generosity, flex creativity
Build perspicacity, stretch out honesty...
Mould and build until you are whole and balanced, stable in any weather.
This journey is not for the thoughtless or unfit.

It is not for the merely knowledgeable. It is not
For everyone.

Into a surging flood step or plunge.
Believe this: every swimmer alters the river's flow
You must choose how you will navigate
Sudden boulders, roiling rapids, unanticipated falls...
(Do not attempt the unbreachable banks.)
You will find no resting place: just hard high walls—
Exposed strata of fossilized assumptions.
Seek out quiet clear pools
Of pristine stillness
For inevitably
The swimmer's moment at the whirlpool comes.

Sudden gaping absence, arrested flow
All swimmers face it
Will you avoid the spinning funnel—
Remain circling forever on the safety of the rim?
Or will you dare the river's test...
Dare to look into the deadly suction with sinewy honesty?
The discipline of your preparation will serve you here
Call this syncope by its name—
All swimmers know it
But many at that moment will not say

Their silence blinds them with endless spinning
A truncated journey, danger averted
Such blindness lacks rigour.
Knowledge is not enough
Your dry tight brain is not enough—a mere mute Cyclops
Do not turn away:
You must engage that blood gorged muscle
The one that is open, that understands flow:
Your *heart* must speak it—
"This is the whirlpool, then."

An interesting shift occurred during the process of writing this poem. I was working with student teachers at the time, and my thoughts were filled with ideas, activities and conversations I was having with them about how to prepare for teaching, what experiences and learning are needed for a university student to take up the identity of 'teacher'. I began composing this poem with my students in mind as my audience. However, as I progressed I found myself influenced by our group discussions of the strengths and weaknesses of the various pedagogical approaches we had experienced in our graduate studies. As I worked on my poem, I realized that what I was really doing

was talking back to those professors who dismissed teaching as 'lesser than' or refused to commit to its demands; I was arguing for an acknowledgement of teaching as rigorous—as rigorous in its own way as, for example, the practices of researching or theorizing—requiring thorough preparation, regular analysis and reflection, and consistent efforts to refine and improve the practice. After I read my poem to the group, we discussed the academic concept of 'rigour' as being too narrow and singular: there are many 'rigours' and many kinds of knowledge and knowing—it is a situated concept. We wanted to resist the academic privileging of purely intellectual, rhetorical rigour and defend other more *embodied* kinds of social performance—such as teaching or art-making—as equally rigorous and worthy.

The academic construct of rigour encompassed a particular dissatisfaction for Kate. Her discontent with her academic experience centred around writing but also involved the notion of other ways of knowing and being—a concern for finding her “authentic voice”. She struggled to find a satisfying way to write her comprehensive exam paper.

Kate: I want to be true to me, to myself, to this project, or whatever, but oh, yeah, right, I've got to...meet these requirements. You know what it's like—we're all creators here. You know when you're doing something and you've got to put that creative element aside...it's like...that's a lot of money I've paid to *not* to listen to that voice...

While she understood and respected the need for rational and articulate argument, she found traditional academic expository prose limiting as a means of personal expression, and she questioned the assumption that expository prose is more clear or more precise than a metaphorical form such as poetry.

Kate: So when you're trying to say something intimate a *thesis* isn't going to cut it... And poetry moves people. Here we are sitting here, and we're *moved* by this (*gestures to a copy of Cheryl's poem*). Whereas if you just wrote a paragraph and *explained* it...it would be just literal. I think it's also interesting that we have these notions that if you write a straight kind of literal academic paper it will be clear and to the point and your reader's going to get what you're saying... and I think that's bullshit. Some of the stuff you read, it's like the 'you-ness' gets washed out and it's just ... clean laundry, without... any essence. I guess there's supposed to be a kind of universality about that, sort of...which I think is meant to translate into some sort of accessibility, right? That somehow more people will get a single common message...But it's funny because there's also such

exclusivity around academia...And I don't think your reader always follows your train of thought because they're reading with their own filters...And you know: 'Oh well, you can't be putting poetry in there because that's not direct, it's not clean enough, it's open to multiple interpretations...'. But are we not trying to invite the reader into the experience of what we've learned, or what we're learning, or what's happening to us? It's like 'Here, come along for my ride. You want to read this? Come along for my experience'. Why does everything have to supposedly fit into this template that in the end doesn't necessarily do what we all think it does, anyway?

We talked at some length about the difficulty of capturing the messy, shifting, “swampy” nature of human experience in literal prose compared to the flexibility and potential playfulness of poetry. Poet Kim Rosen expressed our group’s view: “The human mind likes to make everything black or white—which is what poetry is a medicine for. Poetry requires our ability to open to the ambiguity of life and the mystery, without landing” (Rosen, 2013). Although academic writing is more comfortable for me than poetry, I had often struggled with the ‘tidiness’ of academic prose; I found that *precision* always seemed to involve excision—the omission of points or details that didn’t fit the demands of good rhetoric, that couldn’t be “distorted into clarity” (Law, 2004). In reading scholarly writing, I sometimes wonder: in order to achieve this coherence, what is being left out? What stories, what unruly details of life have been pruned away in order to produce a well-shaped, elegant argument or to slip neatly into place under familiar “theories we know and use [to] provide a coherent and consistent structure for our relationship to the world” (Eisner, 1998, p. 68)? I found Laurel Richardson’s (1994) outline of the historical roots of social science writing helpful in understanding “the flotilla of qualitative writing that is simply not interesting to read because adherence to the model requires writers to silence their own voices and to view themselves as contaminants”—“the model” being built on the 17th and 18th century belief that literary writing (involving fiction, subjectivity and figurative language) was ‘false’ whereas scientific writing was “objective, precise, unambiguous, noncontextual, and nonmetaphoric” (Richardson, 1994, pp. 518-519). Richardson (among others; for example, Lather, 1991; Maguire, 1987; Eisner, 1998) would agree with Kate’s assertion that what passes for ‘literal’ and ‘neutral’ prose is, in fact, value-laden, shaped by entrenched and partisan meanings carried in “unconscious” metaphors and the rhetorical structure itself. Collectively our group wondered if there could be a form of expression that honours the literacies of academic discourse—such as reading and

acknowledging influential thinkers and theoretical work—while still allowing for uniquely personal expression. Kate described this as her quest in writing her comprehensive exam paper:

Kate: I'm looking for a way to do all those things I need to do and want to do—which is talk about theory, talk about data, talk about experience, talk about my interpretation, but do it in a way that no one else can describe. No one else can write this story, no one else can use these words—these are mine, this is my... it's got my heart in it.

Her use of the word “heart” signals a powerful theme that recurs throughout the texts and which underpins the nature of the discourse that we were seeking: Where is *the body* in academic pedagogy? (Apparently nowhere, judging from our graduate school experiences, which often demanded that we spend a five-hour class sitting around a seminar table with little or no attention to bodily needs such as movement breaks, food, back fatigue...). Could there be a kind of scholarly teaching and learning that is intellectual but also that accommodates or even respects rather than denies the body? A more embodied academic pedagogy? I did not encounter Richard Shusterman's *somaesthetics* until after the 'official' end of the study; if I had, I think his perspective would have been embraced by the group and we would have had more rich conversations and art pieces to add to our collection.

Our university programs had opened many intriguing reflective opportunities for us, but they had also acquainted us with the seemingly-unassailable “authoritative voice” (Bakhtin, 1981) of ‘rigorous’ academic discourse; as I progressed through my analysis of our work I realized that it was against this model of reflective practice that we were defining our own collaboration.

6.3. Discourse Necessity #1: Acknowledging the body

Very early on—possibly from the very first meeting—we came to realize that ‘acknowledging the body’ was a central element of our collaborative practice. Later, this acknowledgement was overt, a matter for discussion or artistic exploration, but on earlier occasions it was simply a tacit understanding. The tradition of meeting over a meal, for example, was firmly established from the first meeting, and menu decisions were given

serious attention and priority. In our conversations, references to the body were rueful, often humorous, and centred on its limitations, while on the other hand our art work expressed claims to power (creative, healing, wisdom), celebrations of the body and womanhood. Once again, we made our own meaning dialogically—by having “encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.7): we were defining our collective discourse in opposition to a dominant social ideology. The texts contain many acknowledgements of the social pressure to be thin, to be/look young, to be fashionable, and to the corresponding dismissal of ‘women’s wisdom’ or the knowledge we accrue through having lived through four or five decades. Collectively, over time, this theme emerged: *Even though it is getting larger, flabbier, and weaker, my body has been and still is a source of power and joy. How do I resist the constant pressure to ignore it, devalue it, keep it still, improve it or hide it? Why is it so hard to acknowledge it, celebrate it?* We addressed this theme not only through our enthusiasm for our meals but also through several poems.

Having danced from early childhood and having taught dance in schools for many years, Cheryl was passionate about the power of movement to communicate, and she lamented the general tendency in educational practice (at all levels) to either ignore or discipline the body. All of us were in agreement with Sir Ken Robinson’s (2006) pithy comment in his TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) video: “Truthfully what happens is as children grow up we start to educate them progressively from the waist up. And then we focus on their heads, and slightly to one side”. Even Dara—who deliberately filled her kindergarten students’ days with somatically-focused activities—felt a pressure to curtail their play time or creative time to socialize them in preparation for ‘real school’ expectations such as sitting still for long periods, acquiescing to the dominance of print literacy, or eating (quickly) at scheduled intervals. We lamented that these taken-for-granted educational practices and values—Foucault’s (1995) “technologies of power”, so deeply ingrained in school culture—should begin so early. Promoting dance education—ie. giving her students’ bodies license (and skill) to move expressively—was an act of resistance on Cheryl’s part. Her doctoral work took her into the fields of arts-based research and embodiment theory, and she spiced our conversations with references to her readings. She was particularly enthusiastic about the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999), who argues that humans know the world and themselves primarily through movement: “We come straightaway moving into the

world;... this original kinetic spontaneity that infuses our being and defines our aliveness, is our point of departure for living in the world and making sense of it” (p. 136). As teachers and artists, the rejection of Cartesian mind-body duality made perfect sense to us. In the frenetic intensity of the classroom we often found ourselves acting on instinct, intuition, a hunch, or some other extra-rational form of cognition; and as musicians, dancers, and visual artists, we had all experienced the automaticity of ‘muscle-memory’, those moments when action seems inspired from a proprioceptive, pre-cognitive state. We had no difficulty accepting the notion of ‘embodied knowing’—the idea that all our lived experiences are inscribed onto our bodies and that deeper understandings can be accessed through improvisational artistic practices. Richard Shusterman’s words could have been our own: “We need to think more carefully through the body in order to cultivate ourselves and edify our students, because true humanity is not a mere genetic given but an educational achievement in which body, mind, and culture must be thoroughly integrated” (Shusterman, 2012, p. 26). Cheryl’s photopoem, “Dancer’s Truth”, expresses her valuing of and her delight in connecting to the world through her senses and the movement of her body.

11. *Dancer's Truth* by Cheryl



Dancer's Truth

Dance on rocky shore for grounding... Ocean sees my silent strength... Meanings flung into the sunset... Stillness knows the song that's sung...

*Dance into the fading twilight... Catch this way of knowing's rush...
Open up and embrace anguish... Laugh at life's abiding touch...*

Almost darkness settles quickly... Know these moments speak my truth... Wide expanse of sky is witness... Body moves a dancer's truth

by Cheryl, May 30, 2011

This poem captures Cheryl's absolute commitment to "this way of knowing", to "speak her truth" through movement. It is also a declaration of a bodily connection with the universe: "the wide expanse of sky is witness" as she "flings" her meanings "into the sunset". The image shows Cheryl dancing on a beach, photographed by her daughter, in an exercise she undertook as part of her PhD thesis exploring interconnections between dance and photography. The image supports the poem's sense of free,

expansive movement being made possible by the solid grounding of her feet on the earth. Cheryl's commitment to knowing the world through her body, and her conviction that embodied knowing and learning were a basic right, were supported by scholars who were willing to "challenge the valorization of rationality, the knowledge form of the enlightenment community" (Gitlin, 2008, p. 629). Such thoughts reinforced for us our disposition to take our bodies—with all their imperfections—into account in our reflective practice.

In the spring of our second year, Dara was inspired to contribute her first poem to the group. An enthusiastic writer of poetry in her teens, Dara had not written a poem since receiving dismissive criticism from a professor in her undergraduate years. But decades later, moved by our group conversations and the one-hundredth birthday of a beloved grandmother, Dara created a photo collage of her grandmother and an accompanying poem:

12. *True Beauty* by Dara

Where are the songs
in praise of the Crone?
The wise learned woman
whose value is...none?

A fair maiden once,
Now hair turned to white,
Hidden from view
and pushed out of sight.

Youth lacks the vision
To learn from the wise.
Outer beauty is fleeting
But we value the "prize"

Of a perky bosom,
Tanned legs and tight skin,
Inexperience and ignorance
And no double chin.
Open your eyes and
See what's inside of
The Woman with substance,
Whose gifts are denied.

Take a bite of the apple.
Explore the unknown

Learn the passions and wisdom
Of a true beauty,
The Crone!

Taking up the archetypal references initiated by Cheryl's "Crone" poem, Dara's poem celebrates age and experience, passion and wisdom, embracing the Crone identity and its claim to power. Her poem represents a thread of our discourse that questioned: *As a woman, what/who sustains me? What meaning do I connect to archetypes such as Yemaya, Laloba, The Maiden, The Mother, The Queen, The Crone?* Similarly, Kate chose to celebrate womanhood in her glosa and introduced us to a Celtic variation of the Crone archetype: the Cailleach, the divine hag (or Queen) of winter, associated with the season from November to spring and with rebirth, with creating mountains and rivers, and with elemental powers of nature.

13. *If there is a river* by Kate

*if there is a river
more beautiful than this
bright as the blood red
edge of the moon*

~Lucille Clifton, *Poem in Praise of Menstruation*, 2000

Cailleach awaits,
old bones gather flesh, hair, skin
blood hot and alive
she calls, wails into the night
the cold moon trickling down the sky
skin answers with a shiver
no sleeping here, no graves of long dead elders,
no dusty stories or decay
hag's song silenced? never
if there is a river

they burned their bras and set their hearts on fire
Amazon sisters, denying their breasts to dying lies
stood up angry, knocked down, mocked
but Nellie danced, britches and boots
no tapping red shoe illusions, no place like home
her battle cry still ringing no less
blood roaring, carving canyons deep and wide
gone forever the voiceless landscape,
there is no bliss more beautiful than this

record shows the sad and sinful tale
of women's treasures lost and looted
of bodies tossed, torn, and twisted
dreams stifled
hopes crushed
and bloodless battles waged that could
force her hand to self-inflicted wounds
that leached the very marrow of her bones
her song silenced in patriarchal mud
bright as the blood

oh moon
you pull the oceans of a woman's heart
and dance her limbs with wisdom
while science tries to draw its shroud
to blind and bind and silence
yet the crone stands immune
she howls,
screeches, insists, knows
my blood, my bones attune
red edge of the moon

Kate's earthy images of women's power and its roots in natural cycles represent a strong thread that weaves through our collective work. References to resisting patriarchal domination, to the demands and joys of womanhood, to cycles and 'flow' in our lives, and the value of wisdom that does not arise from theory but from lived experience,

combined with the frequency of words such as “heart”, “guts”, “bliss”, “mud”, “visceral”, “blood”, “bones” and “sweat”, occur (in both conversations and artwork) in opposition to a vision of academic work as largely ‘disembodied’ and a social world that works to “bind”, “silence”, “deny”, “stifle”, “crush” or otherwise dismiss the experiences and insights of women.

Our attention to the body was not merely background to or in any way external to our reflections on teaching. It was a key philosophical and epistemological element. We saw our multiple identities—as teacher, artist, inquirer, student, mother, daughter, spouse, friend, wise woman, care-giver...and their (often undervalued) attendant competencies and powers—as rooted in our bodies. We were seeking a way to integrate personal life with professional life and inquiry, to create a discursive space that allowed learning and reflective practice to shift with the cyclic and ‘flowing’ nature of life and the demands of all the many identities we attempted to juggle as women in contemporary Canadian society. It became central to the constitution of our group that we welcomed the integration of all those identities and their related competencies into our dialogue. To try to draw rigid boundaries around one’s ‘teacher-self’ and isolate that from one’s ‘other’ selves seemed artificial and inauthentic.

6.4. Discourse Necessity #2: Acknowledging multiple identities and multiple knowledges

Co-ordinating four busy schedules in order to meet was often difficult. The types of demands that sometimes took priority were varied: issues of health (appointments, injuries, illness), treacherous driving conditions in winter, care of aging parents, children or other close family members who needed care or support; holiday travel; thesis writing deadlines; extra-hours work commitments such as concerts or performances or school ‘parent nights’. The interweaving of our professional and personal lives in our conversations and in our art work became an established pattern through tacit accord rather than through any purposeful exchange. It came about instinctively—a ‘gut level’ assumption that we need not filter out from our conversations references to other important aspects of our lives, our other identities beyond that of ‘teacher’. We believed with Parker Palmer (1998) that teachers “teach who they are”, that a teacher’s practice

synthesizes, draws on, and embodies all of that person's experiences, memories, values and knowledge. One evening, we each brought an image that represented 'teaching' or 'being a teacher'. Coincidentally, both Dara and I chose an image of a woman juggling—mine was on a tightrope and Dara's was riding a unicycle. As she put it: "That is what I see teaching as—someone riding a unicycle, juggling. Because life is teaching! Teaching is life— they totally overlap. It's about finding that balance in life, isn't it?" We wanted to resist the notion of a singular identity or any attempt at "artificially predefining ... the boundaries of 'where a teacher begins and where the teacher ends'" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 317). For us, the postmodern concept of identity made sense: a "self-dialogue between different I-positions", where "boundaries between the personal and the professional context become indistinct" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 316).

All that a teacher considers relevant to his profession, that he or she tries to achieve in work, is part of the whole 'personal' self. Vice versa, a teacher is not merely a professional regardless of all that he or she is otherwise: personal histories, patterned behaviour, future concerns may all inform the position(s) of the teacher as professional.

(Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 316)

It was important to our collaborative practice that we should not feel pressured to shut out 'other' selves but rather to help each other to keep them in balance.

The development of trust in the group assured an empathetic response to a pressing concern—whether it was personal or pedagogical was irrelevant. Because teaching is so much a relational activity, it is difficult to perform during times of high stress. We all had personal experience of trying to teach during an emotional or family crisis, and we knew the costs. An unstated purpose of the group was to provide affirmation, encouragement, and care for each other, should those times arise (which they did). The development of the group identity as 'Sisters' was emblematic of this value. This kind of support was both pedagogical and personal—the two categories were inseparable for us. Cheryl articulated it:

Cheryl: Feelings, emotional health and social health... not shutting out death, illness or loss but taking the time to listen, to care and to share these realities as they have happened to us... realizing that there's no way we continue our 'work' until we have taken care of the soul, the spirit and the emotional realm—and the body. These discussions have been part of our inquiry. We

can't shut them out. The personal is very connected to who you are—identity and self—it's who you are as a teacher. So if it makes you stronger as a person, it's going to make you stronger as a teacher.

We found support for our commitment to acknowledging our multiple identities in the work of feminist and arts-based academics.

Reading a short play together reinforced us in the path we were carving out. In “A Script for Three Voices: ‘Undone Business’ in the Academy” Shauna Butterwick, Jane Dawson, and Jane Munro (Butterwick, Dawson, & Munro, 2007) collaboratively created a dramatic performance for an academic conference presentation. Their piece explores the feelings, questions, doubts, frustrations, and dreams of three women scholars using theatrical metaphors of space, props, movement, choral speech. The women explore why they are finding “our experience of academic culture as ‘the way things are’ and our own emotional responses as problematic, reflective of something being ‘wrong’—usually something wrong with *us*. We are feeling something in our bodies—something is not fitting, not quite right”. Taking their cue from feminist methodology, particularly Dorothy Smith’s notion of ‘making the everyday problematic’ (Smith, 1987), they begin with their “everyday lived experience, speaking to and shedding light on what may seem trivial and ‘natural’” (Butterwick et al., p. 3). Our graduate student experiences had introduced us to some of the features of academic life that felt ‘not quite right’, and we could identify with those, but more significant for us was the legitimization of our approach to inquiry: by examining our everyday lives as teachers. This *did* feel right—and useful, and productive in helping us address the issues in our practice—and it did not require that we entirely jettison our interest in theory and research. Reading this play reassured us that there was in fact real academic support for our wish to create a discourse that made space for creativity, collaboration, narrative, and did not insist on tightly rational rhetoric as the *only* epistemology.

One passage in the play initiated an especially energetic discussion. Jane Munro’s character refers to a passage from Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas* in which Woolf characterizes “the Angel in the house”:

She was intensely sympathetic.
She was immensely charming.
She was utterly unselfish....

*She sacrificed herself daily.
If there was chicken she took the leg;
If there was a draught she sat in it—
In short, she was so constituted
That she never had a mind or a wish of her own.*

Jane: According to Virginia, it is *killing* the Angel of the House that is central to the occupation of being a woman writer. And maybe the woman academic as well. (Butterwick et al, 2007, p. 4)

We discussed this passage at some length. The Angel was a social role that our mothers would recognize and had to varying degrees embodied. *How much have things changed since their day and since Woolf's day? How deeply did we identify with this persona?* None of us could claim to be “utterly unselfish”, and we denied that we “never had a mind or a wish of our own”, although we could see that we definitely made small “daily sacrifices” to accommodate our households, our students, even colleagues. *Does “killing the Angel” mean totally rejecting all unselfish behaviour, giving to or caring for others? Is it really necessary to “kill the Angel”, or would it be enough to stifle her more consciously?* Our identities as teachers, heads of households, daughters of aging parents all demanded a willingness to put others’ needs before our own at times—should we feel guilty about that? No, that seemed wrong. Kate made the point that one consequence of the feminist struggle has been to open up the previously limited options for women, to allow us to choose freely how we participate in society....there is no single ‘right way’ to be a woman. We also questioned what “killing the Angel” meant in relation to becoming a woman writer or academic. Like teaching, creative work (including knowledge production) requires reserves of energy, attention, and time that—for most of us—have to be diverted from other pursuits and relationships. Committing to jobs such as teaching or knowledge production could be construed as a kind of selfishness for which the others in our lives pay a price. *But “killing the Angel” sounds so final and total—it is possible to banish or ‘shrink’ the Angel without obliterating her?* Once again, it seemed to be a question of finding balance and of becoming critically conscious of the social mores, settings, and customs that serve to bind and limit our options. By including in our discourse stories and discussion of our lives outside teaching, we were responding to a call that Rodgers and Scott (2008) found to be widely expressed in teacher education literature: “an implicit charge that teachers should work towards an *awareness* of their identity and the contexts, relationships and emotions that shape

them, and (re)claim the authority of their own *voice*" (Rodgers & Scott, 2008, p. 733, original italics). For us, treating *all* of our everyday lived experience as worthy of inclusion in our discourse was part of that reclamation process.

In one other way "A Script for Three Voices" supported us in making room for the various identities and knowledges we embodied. The play encouraged our interest in exploring the possibilities of artistic expression in our reflective practice, particularly poetry. "And so we turn to poetry and resistance. Poetry is not a luxury. ... Poetry gives form to experience often held in silence... Poetry provides a language of blood and bone" (Butterwick et al., 2007, p.8). This was another feature of feminist methodology that we had instinctively embraced—that 'felt right'. Not only was poetry a more 'authentic' and natural voice for some of us, but it just seemed logical to draw on whatever communicative modes would best serve our need to think, to question, and to express. Poetry came up often as an expressive option that would not require special equipment, materials, or space. "It's very embodied, interactive and honours emotions. I'm always amazed at the kinds of stories and insights that emerge when I use or witness others using the arts because they tap into a different level of knowledge" (Butterwick et al., 2007, p.11). In these ways, then, the work of these three women academics resonated with and reinforced our own reflective work as teacher-inquirers.

6.5. Discourse Necessity #3: Inviting multiple forms of expression

My past experiences in arts education and my interest in its intersections with multiliteracies theory and multimodal social semiotics had led me to wonder about the possibilities of expanding the usual range of expressive genres/forms in teacher reflection. My belief that learning and growth involve a shift in identity and social participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and my understanding of identity as dialogical (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Bakhtin, 1981; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 2001; Rodgers & Scott, 2008; Taylor, 1989), prompted me to want to explore that question collaboratively. My experience as a teacher convinced me if I was going to invite others to collaborate in any sustained way, I needed to make sure the experience would be challenging but safe, serious but fun. I had invited women who as teacher-inquirers

willingly embraced the value of exploring aspects of our lives, especially our teaching, through a variety of means, and who, as teachers, wanted to offer the same rich opportunities to our students. However, we also had to acknowledge the flip side of that coin: that working in unfamiliar media can be unproductive and frustrating at first, and sharing the products of those explorations can be emotionally risky. The group readily acknowledged an obligation to push ourselves to venture beyond our own 'comfort zones', to take the double risk of exploring unfamiliar media *and* sharing those results, since we often expected our students to do the same. Cheryl reminded us:

Cheryl: In order to be successful teachers in the arts we need to understand this connection [between using a variety of modes or aesthetic media and making our own meaning]. We want our students to express ideas through the arts, and so we too must honour the craft of creation... in various art forms and between various art forms.

We agreed that we needed to understand the exploratory and learning process from within and not always from a position of expertise. For me, having to step out into the unfamiliar territory of writing poetry or making visual art was neither easy nor comfortable and provided an excellent insight into what many of my students experience when I ask them to operate in an unfamiliar mode of expression. I knew, too, that in order for our collaboration to be sustained beyond one or two meetings, it would need to be fun—not fun as in trivial, flippant, or merely entertaining but in the sense of stimulating and rewarding. de Castell and Jenson (2003), analyzing the kind of non-didactic, “intuitive, embodied learning” that occurs in video gaming, argue for exactly this “serious play” approach to education: “No educational purposes are served by driving a wedge between work and play, learning and pleasure, discipline and passionate intensity. Indeed, a reclamation of the classical connection between ‘learning’ and ‘playing’ is long overdue” (de Castell & Jenson, 2003, p. 51). Our ventures into experimenting with various aesthetic media reinforced several key beliefs that came to characterize our shared discourse: [1] it is possible to grapple with profound questions in media other than writing, and [2] as teachers we had a duty to do so, and [3] that ‘serious fun’ is not at all an oxymoron but is in fact an effective way of learning together.

Kate captured a sense of fun in a witty parody of typical professional development language. As a province-wide ‘professional day’ approached (during which

schools would be closed to allow teachers to attend meetings, workshops, and courses), Dara, Kate and I decided to take advantage of the opportunity to use Kate's well-supplied classroom to experiment with some introductory-level visual art techniques—something that was difficult to do when we were meeting at each other's homes. (Cheryl had chosen to spend the day working on her thesis). Several days in advance, Kate e-mailed the following invitation:

14. Art: Your Way by Kate

Art: Your Way

Urban Elementary, in collaboration with Simon Fraser University is offering a day of creativity for the upcoming Professional Development Day, February 17.

Participants are invited to enjoy a collaborative atmosphere with colleagues exploring their own creative process.

Discover the thrill of ripping fabric, making a mess and using as many paint brushes as you like. Spend hours in a classroom setting without being interrupted by incessant questions, minor emergencies, PA announcements, or untimely calls from the office. Look forward to discovering how art can be an antidote for today's over-worked, underfunded teacher.

Select your lunch from a variety of ethnically diverse restaurants on Commercial Drive.

Register early, only 3 spots available! Choose from the following sessions:

- Dabbling and Babbling
- Art for Your Heart
- Pastels for Peace
- Arting Around not Farting Around
- Say it with Art
- Annie Get your Glue Guns
- Painting; Knowing When to Stop
- The Truth About Glitter
- Feminist Sewing: What Gloria Never Told You

Dara, Kate and I did in fact spend that day highly engaged—with “effort, commitment, and determination”, like the videogamers studied by de Castell and Jenson—in simple art-making activities (enriched, of course, by an excellent Szechuan lunch which we ordered in). On one level we were ‘dabbling’—in that we were playing with and learning about an unfamiliar medium—but we were definitely not ‘babbling’. In fact, for much of the day we hardly spoke. Kate played some quiet music on her computer as we worked,

and we were so absorbed in our own creative process that there was very little conversation except at lunch. Like video gamers, we were able to “develop knowledge and skills quickly, learning without being taught, from and within the environment of the [activity], with success promptly rewarded without being judged” (de Castell & Jenson, 2003, p. 52). Similarly, when the three of us got together on another occasion, this time to make an art piece as a wedding gift for Cheryl, our concentration was intense and our conversation was laconic, limited to the project at hand. Later, Dara compared the ways that art-making and talking communicate:

Dara: I guess it depends on how articulate you are. Because in art—you know: 'a picture is worth a thousand words' and all that—there's a lot in an image, there's a lot of feelings that are being called up as you are making the art. You can talk about those, but to get really deep down, it seems to show up in the art. A little deeper, a little more feeling, a little more emotion... When you talk you have to choose your words, but in the art you could just create in that moment. I found that when we were making art—when we made that piece for Cheryl—that collaboration was amazing—but there wasn't much talking. But yet there was a strong bond that was happening there.

Creating a single piece collaboratively was particularly bonding, but even when we were working silently on our own individual pieces, there was a feeling of connection and communication—not only through the art pieces, which spoke in a concise visual language that forestalled verbal explanation—but also through the shared ‘atelier’ experience, a kind of sanctuary-space devoted to focused and productive creativity... collaborative, serious, but fun. As a group, we placed a high value on making space for ‘serious fun’—especially as an element of learning we felt was under-appreciated in education in general and had definitely been missing from most of our own school and university education. As de Castell and Jenson put it: “Serious play and schooling are frequently at odds” (de Castell & Jenson, 2003, p. 51). To us this amounts to a kind of social deprivation. So many adults in our acquaintance have little familiarity with the joy of creative expression—“I’m no artist”, “I can’t sing”, “I don’t dance”, “poetry is beyond me”.... We saw this absence of aesthetic engagement as a serious deficit in their educational lives. All of us had repeatedly observed how early in their school lives students begin to self-identify (or are identified by others) as lacking in ‘artistic’, ‘musical’, or other ‘talent’ and their educational path is channelled away from the arts. We

recognized that the reasons for this underrating of aesthetic development in educational practice are complex; we had observed among our acquaintances, colleagues, popular media, and students' parents, for example, [1] a residual post-Romantic belief that artistic production is dependent on divine inspiration and giftedness—"you either have it, or you don't"—so only the talented should pursue an art; or [2] a general perception that taking a fine art course amounts to a low-priority 'frill' compared to practical job-preparation or rigorous academic-preparation courses. We encountered these myths frequently in our working lives and were committed to resisting those social forces and doing our best to provide our students with opportunities to experience the pleasures of multimodal/aesthetic expression; furthermore, we claimed that pleasure as necessary to our own learning and growth. Kate described her deep delight in taking on the challenge of writing a glosa:

Kate: I found that writing this [*gestures to glosa*]... aaaaah, I need to write way more poetry. 'Cause it's really, really satisfying... I really feel like I can say something that means something to me. It's so much easier to play with the words and to feel like yeah, that embodies something that I want to put out into the world. And maybe somebody will get it, and maybe they won't, but I did it. It's there for me, right? And it's very, very satisfying—very satisfying.

All of us identified with Kate's sense of pleasure and accomplishment—the transcripts are peppered with admissions (from all of us) of having chosen to spend time working on a poem or other art piece when we 'should' have been doing something else. The kind of absorbed engagement and participatory learning that de Castell and Jenson observed in gamers is very similar to the intense and enjoyable focus we shared in creating and sharing our art pieces: "Game play, at its best and most powerful, is engaged seriously, with effort, commitment, and determination, and this, like any serious engagement in learning, affords pleasure, excitement, immersion and playfulness, creating a zone of automaticity, of flow, in which far more is learned than can be written or said about it" (de Castell & Jenson, 2003, p. 51). We claimed the right to venture into that territory in our reflective work together.

Another pillar of our reflective practice grew out of our own histories as students of dance, drama, music and visual art, as well as our long years of observing children in classrooms. We shared a passionate belief that all humans have an innate need to

make meaning and that words are neither the only, nor necessarily the best, medium for doing so. “Words do not, in their literal form or number, exhaust what we can know. The limits of our language do not define the limits of our cognition” (Eisner, 2002). Dara expressed our common belief that people will use whatever languages of expression are available to them: *“Sometimes there’s a need to write, so you write. And sometimes there’s just a need to create with your hands [gesture], and it’s a different feeling, a different thought. So it just depends...”* For us, creative expression was a basic need and an essential human right. *“Everybody’s birthright”* Cheryl called it as she lamented the predominance in local high schools of athletics or ‘functional movement’ over dance or ‘expressive movement’:

Cheryl: And that creative movement where you make it up yourself and are given the tools to make it up with, that’s still not valued. Absolutely not valued. And that’s after 12 years of curriculum [The first BC Ministry of Education dance curriculum had been published 12 years earlier]. Don’t you think it should be everybody’s birthright to know how to move creatively?

Or to express with paint, pencil, cloth, stone, wood, words, voice, instrument, digital technology, or a combination of whatever media are at hand. We believed that “all modes have the potential to contribute equally to meaning” (Jewitt, 2013, p. 3) and we enjoyed the freedom to select “the available form that is most apt to express the meaning [we wanted] to express at a given moment” (Jewitt, 2013, p. 6).

Although we all had some expertise in more than one aesthetic medium, and it was part of the group’s constitution that we were committed to experimenting with unfamiliar forms, we each had our own preferred languages of expression. We did not exclude words as a creative medium, but we held strong preferences in terms of the genre of verbal text. Of the four of us, I was the only one who felt any creative pleasure in writing academic prose, although—like the others—I consider its strict rhetorical structure a more limited, less expansive medium than other forms (such as dance or music) or even other verbal texts, such as poetry. We were all able to identify with Kate’s struggle to express herself within the structure of her Masters degree comprehensive exam; the video footage shows the depth of her frustration reflected in her tone and body language: *“Yeah, that literal expression. I really found that in writing my stuff that ... somehow trying to nail it down ...that being literal, it lost its... um ... it was*

so hard to keep my soul there... it was so hard to play. I felt like I had to work so hard with those words to try to say what had happened for me". Scholars in arts-based research such as Ronald Pelias have identified similar frustrations: "I know there is more than making a case, more than establishing criteria and authority, more than what is typically offered up. That more has to do with the heart, the body, the spirit" (Pelias, 2004, p. 1). Kate compared the essay-writing process to preparing the oral presentation of her comprehensive exam: "So of course doing an oral comp it was so much better because it was like this whole other multi-sensory experience, and I felt that I had chosen some pieces that I really needed, that I really wanted to say, and I didn't have to say it the way I had done it in the paper". But for Kate, writing poetry was the most satisfying and illuminating way to write about meaningful experiences:

Kate: The poetry for me was really exciting. Because it helped me dig into some places that I don't think I could have got to if I was just trying to talk about it or even write a story—because it was just this pure metaphor. Oh, it was so *freeing* to ... I just felt like I was free to experience what was going on for me in our group through some of those early pieces of poetry, so that was very exciting and I felt a measure of confidence with my product.

We understood her description of "digging into some places" and feeling "a measure of confidence with the product" as a deeply satisfying process of making sense of our lived experiences by bringing meaning and form together in a semiotic sign (Bezemer & Kress, 2008). And we shared, understood and respected the need to express our individual meaning or message or insight in whatever form (or mode or medium) felt comfortable and appropriate.

For Cheryl, the drive to express is a key element of her identity as an artist; it is an ever-present motivation that she often has to subordinate to other demands in her life but that never actually ceases:

Cheryl: When I think of making art, there are certain images... it's like oh, I want to paint that [gesture], I want to paint that [gesture], I want to make a quilt of that, take a picture of that... and I have this collection inside my brain that just kind of ... festers. And it's festered for a very long time, it's kind of my internal artistic fabric. If I didn't have that, what would there be in there? [laughs] I can't imagine it...

Dara effectively combined images with words, often in multi-voiced dialogue form. One evening she brought a poster she had made with photographs and text depicting a conflict that she was dealing with professionally: although parents and teachers have the same goal of 'educating' a child, they sometimes clash in their perceptions of what is needed. Negotiating this type of conflict at her school was stressing her. Waking from a dream in the middle of the night, she got up and created an expressive web of images and phrases expressing the conflicting voices of a child, the parents and the teacher regarding 'what the child needs'. When she showed it to us, she disclaimed: "I thought 'Oh, this looks so childish, I don't want to show it'". Her hesitancy prompted a conversation about the value of the *process* in any medium and the 'right' of everyone to be free to express in whatever way is meaningful. In the kind of reflective practice in which we were engaged, the quality of the product was not paramount—it was subordinate to the process of making meaning. Cheryl's passionate reply to Dara borrowed a phrase from Rainer Maria Rilke, "No, no, you must 'birth your images'! They are waiting!". She later chose to explore this theme more deeply within the strict glosa form:

15. *On the birthing of images by Cheryl*

*You must give birth to your images.
They are the future waiting to be born...
Fear not the strangeness you feel.
The future must enter you long before it happens..
just wait for the birth, for the hour of new clarity.*

~Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

Ten year olds playing on the sand bar
in the tidal pools as seen from a distance
born as they were on an old farm
then up rooted and placed on briny shores
pushed out to sea by logs
I want to paint my children's paternal great grandfather
as photographed on the cover of BC Fisherman
before he was frozen and drowned off the coast of Vancouver Island one winter
Man of the Sea Coast is what we named our son, Adrian...
"You must give birth to your images"

This collection of instances lingers inside my being
playing hide and seek with reality

dodging in and out of focus but always
filling me full of meanings that tug and remind
strongly defined as they daily pool and swirl
within my very being
One of my purposes in life
is to transform these images
into dances, paper, clay, screenplays, film or fabric for
"they are the future waiting to be born"

There is a strangeness as these images are squeezed
into the very margins of my being
shoved hard up against the wall
that dictates my living
they're pushed to the brink of the edge of time
Though they are the landmarks of my living here
They anchor my very being to the earth
I come home to them each night
They're there when I close my eyes and dream
"Fear not the strangeness you feel"

Am I fearful of all birth even the birthing of images
cherished and held within this heart of many seasons
What if I birthed them all, these well-loved gems I've collected?
What if I birthed them all and there was nothing left?
No texture left in my yearning about them
Just blank, whitewashed empty membranes staring at me
waving in the breeze or still as death
"The future must enter you long before it happens"

Is this faith then... ?
waiting for something else to bubble up
not leave you blank, alone, untried
no art to make, no muse to chase after midnight
no more collecting beach glass or pie recipes
a log jam of images piling up a jumbled mess
breeding with each other in the richness of the dark
"Just wait for the birth, for the hour of new clarity"

This poem represents two more important beliefs that characterized our group discourse. First, it depicts how deeply interwoven in Cheryl's identity is the drive to create, to express the "log jam of images" she carries in her imagination, "breeding with each other in the richness of the dark". She does not like to confine herself to a single

expressive mode or form but loves to work in many: “dances, paper, clay, screenplays, film or fabric”—her choice depends on which mode will best support her in reaching “the hour of new clarity”. We all shared her belief that there are many ways of knowing the world and making meaning of our human experience—a pillar of multimodal social semiotic theory: “People orchestrate meaning through their selection and configuration of modes” (Jewitt, 2013, p. 4). Whether it was a poster exploring a conflict at school, a photographic exploration of dance, image and text, a self-portrait collage of found images, or a poem about aging, we felt much satisfaction, deepened our relationships, and reached new insights through expressing ideas, wonderings, fears, conflicts, and celebrations through a variety of modes. Cheryl reflected on how engaging in aesthetic (or multimodal) explorations allowed us to wrestle with big or hard ideas:

Cheryl: I think of these [our various creations] as a collection of samples of the ‘multilingual’ ways we work... We do not seek to be conclusive, realizing that it's not possible to lash creativity down. The pieces that we have created are mere drops in the pond of potential creative play that we are each capable of doing... This is a way of working in the arts ... of how we create and play our questions into being. We wrestle with them and they become quilts, and masks and movies and poems and capes and feasts!!! Just as easily they could become paintings, skits or pots! Working in the arts, finding meaning in the arts means doing just that... settling upon a medium and working through it until the expressions match the meanings that we sense are our own.

We discovered that theorists in both arts education and multimodal education agreed with us. Cheryl’s use of the word “multilingual” to describe our work was supported by arts educator Elliot Eisner: “The term ‘language’ can be conceptualized to refer to the use of any form of representation in which meaning is conveyed or construed... Thus, in this sense, dance, music, and the visual arts are languages through which both meaning and mind are promoted” (Eisner, 2003, p. 342). Much of Eisner’s work defends the cognitive and intellectual value of making meaning through aesthetic media: “Many of the most complex and subtle forms of thinking take place when students have an opportunity either to work meaningfully on the creation of images—whether visual, choreographic, musical, literary, or poetic—or to scrutinize them appreciatively” (Eisner, 2002, pp. xi-xii). Similarly, multimodal semiotician and educator, Gunther Kress analyzes human communication as a process of responding to a ‘prompt’ by utilizing

whatever semiotic resources are at hand to interpret and transform aspects of the prompt to fit a personal meaning:

A social semiotic theory of communication makes two fundamental assumptions: communication is always a response to a prompt, and communication happens when there is interpretation. ... When that sketch of a theory of communication is turned into an approach to education, teaching and learning, the learner as interpreter is central. The learner's interest (re-)shapes the materials presented by a teacher as the (curricular) prompt and transforms them in line with the learner's interests. (Kress, 2009, p. 207)

The collected products of our three years of collaboration indicate that experimenting in various modes and sharing our results comprised a key element of our reflective practice. Sometimes risky, usually fun, and always meaningful, this approach enabled us to weave *all* our complex and layered identities, our varied knowledges and modes of expression into a richly embodied and rewarding reflective discourse.

The spirit of our intentions and our practice was beautifully captured in a poem of Cheryl's which, in its way, was as influential in affirming our group identity as Kate's early poem "Yemaya's Sisters". Not long after we read "A Script in Three Voices" Cheryl sent around by email the following poem and image—written, by her own admission, when she should have been working on her thesis. Virginia Woolf's metaphor and our 'Angel in the House' conversation had clearly resonated with her.

16. *In the Draft of Academia: Our Study Group* by Cheryl

In The Draft of Academia: Our Study Group

*We built an open space of caring
where our women's ways of knowing
honoured chocolate as a food group
and laughter spilled at ends of days.
While we sipped on cups of weakest tea
in the company of other sisters
who long have railed against these shared inequities
said their pieces in passing through this life
where quests for meaning are contested
by other's wants and needs.*

*Our circle of wisdom embraced
a grandma's 100th birthday
a niece's trauma,
a daughter's experience of death and loss of love
and the enduring of all our mothers ways.
Our wisdom honoured bodies
and the messiness of life
there is no separation from the body
of the head, the heart, the soul.
We shared the stories that have shaped us
told our students' stories too
and we wondered how to teach them best.*

*My understanding of my place in academia has deepened
to one of more secure acceptance of myself
and validation that I do know what I know.
My woman's experience of life
was held hostage to all the isms I survived
I had to kill a few angels to get there
in the company of like minded murderesses
who cackled and teased as they advised
not to stay seated in the downward draft of Academia.*

by Cheryl, May, 2011

For me, this poem captures the essence of our group's collaboration—our multiple identities, our mutual trust, the values we embraced and those we resisted. The accompanying image is another in the series taken by Cheryl's daughter for Cheryl's thesis exploration. She had shared with us her initial hesitation to put herself in front of the camera as a dancer and her eventual relaxation and enjoyment of the process—and even of the final photographic products. To me the image represents her courage in pushing past her hesitation, the power of the collaboration between women (mother and daughter, in this case), and—coupled with her poem—the richness of aesthetic languages in capturing or expressing what would otherwise be arduous and convoluted.

Chapter 7.

What did it all mean? Assessing gains and losses

This study was prompted by a very pragmatic issue: given the widely acknowledged value of reflection on professional practice, how can inquiring teachers integrate regular and effective reflection into their busy lives? Teacher education literature is heavy with claims supporting the effectiveness and value of individual written reflection, and our group's graduate study experiences support those claims, but as working teachers we found incorporating systematic written reflection into daily life was extremely challenging. Our experiment was to engage in less private, more collaborative reflecting and to do so using expressive modes beyond prose writing. We had a very enjoyable experience—but in the end, *What did it all mean? Was our collaborative multimodal approach to reflection effective?* In the next chapter I will discuss what our experience might mean for others engaged in teacher reflective practice and/or for scholarly understanding of teacher reflection, but here I would like to assess the significance of this experience for each of us in the group; in particular:

- What did we gain by collaborating and by using aesthetic modes of expression?
- What might we have lost?

7.1. Gains

In assessing what we gained from our shared experience, I realized that most of our texts addressed in one way or another a kind of personal growth or gain; however the transcripts from our individual semi-structured interviews were particularly relevant at this point. The interviews were intended to explore what meaning our shared experience held for each of us, inviting an assessment of growth or change—whether in practice or values. (I include in this assessment my own written responses to the interview questions which I had communicated to the group by email after the last interview). We

all indicated that we felt we had grown professionally, both pedagogically—inside the classroom—and in our professional relationships outside the classroom, as well. These gains appear most commonly in the form of new insights or reinforced beliefs leading to changes in classroom practice, collaboration, and reflection. The value of our shared artistic experiences is a strong thread running through these assessments. Our creative work seemed to serve both as a means of documenting our group identity and as a method of stimulating thinking and making meaning regarding our educational inquiries as well as other life experiences.

7.1.1. Growth in teaching: Pedagogical insights

With regard to daily classroom practice, we expressed our growth not in terms of teaching strategies (or only rarely) but in terms of new deeper understandings and insights... about our teaching selves, about creativity and the creative process, about the value both of multimodal expression and of risk taking in the classroom. One theme expressed in common was the importance of giving students many opportunities to create, and especially the importance of allowing time for the creative process to unfold, rather than rushing to a finished product. Dara expressed this 'process-over-product' perspective most concretely:

*Dara: I learned a lot about my teaching that I could take back with me. I found that something that was frustrating in our group was time constraint. 'OK, we're going to write a poem, and bring it next week' but meanwhile the rest of my life was going on, and my full time job, and I'd think "Well, I'm not getting paid for this"... And then I'd have written the poem, and I'd realize "Oh, I have to *make* this time...". And I realized that I was doing that with my students: "OK, you've got 20 minutes, write a poem!" And having experienced this, I realize it doesn't work that way—so now I allow a *lot* more time... to explore and to create and to let them play with ideas and with materials... rather than "OK, 20 minutes: go!" So that's changed my practice.*

Kate described increased feelings of motivation and empathy with her students on several levels. For her, the emphasis on process extended to allowing more time for learning in general; she agreed with Lave and Wenger's (1991) contention that significant learning is transformative, and it takes time. *"I feel more... motivated, more inspired to remember that those deep conversations we had changed me, and it takes time for that to percolate"*. We had often discussed our feelings of conflict between

allowing students to pursue their own inquiries (and the usefulness of the arts in that pedagogical approach) and the need to adhere to prescribed curriculum. Kate and her school colleagues, in becoming acknowledged as a 'fine arts, inquiry-based school', were wrestling with this dilemma. Her experience with our creative projects reinforced her belief in the value of incorporating aesthetic practices/strategies in her teaching:

Kate: I think it's still changing my teaching practice. It's still underway. But I want to say that I have more of a balance—it's taken the focus off the more linear-type response, you know: teach-produce-teach-produce... The more we had those conversations and the more we had our own experiences with the creative process, the more I could see that 'Gee, I am still kind of narrow in my assessment methods'. And now I feel like I'm allowed to be more abstract or suggest to my kids some less defined ways of integrating learning or sharing their experience. Inside I think that I always had an inclination that way, but I think now I feel more validated that that's the way to go...that art can be a way of assessing. The more we give children—because I work with 8, 9 and 10 year olds—the more that I let them have that experience, the more likely they are to take the reins and to utilize different methods of artistic expression as a way of somehow coalescing their experience or expressing what we've just been working on.

Another pedagogical insight shared by the group came out of our experiencing unfamiliar (and sometimes uncomfortable) forms of expression. I felt that my participation helped move me forward by expanding my repertoire of teaching strategies using the visual arts (in which I have little training or experience). Like Kate, I found that the group members' genuine curiosity and questions about my teaching prompted me to think in new ways and to attempt pedagogical experiments I might not otherwise have imagined. Kate revisited her initial discomfort during our movement sessions and reiterated the idea of giving enough time for experimentation and learning: "It was a good reminder to me: we're all going to have comfort in different places and you gotta give lots and lots of playing around time before they can integrate that and make it a useful way to express themselves". I, too, had found some of our activities challenging and 'risky', and I kept that in mind as I asked my own students to engage in multimodal activities:

Kathy: I have definitely had my boundaries expanded in various aesthetic media. I had had some experience with dance and music, but poetry and painting were totally new (and scary) for me. Having to step out and try writing poetry or making visual art was not easy or comfortable for me and

was an excellent reminder of what many students experience when I ask them to operate in an uncomfortable mode. I made use of that insight in working with my student teachers. Being in this group also reminded me to try integrating more ‘multiple literacies’ or modes into every day... I was inspired by the examples everyone else brought in to talk about.

In general, our group expressed a renewed belief in the importance of allowing students time and opportunities to make meaning in their own preferred ways—we wanted to spend more time encouraging them to direct their own learning and less time assessing or ranking them. In her interview, Cheryl described how our group had reinforced her convictions about placing the students rather than the curriculum at the centre of her practice.

Cheryl: The closer I got to the end of 35 years of teaching, the more strongly it became about the kids—just more strongly than ever. I think I’ve always been that way but it was really... honed. I think it’s really ‘I don’t care—this is who I am... AND this is what’s important in education, and I’m doing it, but other people should be doing it as well’.

Kathy: And that was partly because of approaching retirement but also partly because of our group?

Cheryl: Yes, because we talked about those things in our group. [*Prioritizing students’ needs and interests over curriculum*] it’s an underlying current that’s there, but if we don’t consciously tap into it, how can we share it, how can we make it *known*?

Our collaboration supported not only Cheryl but all of us in our commitment to resisting those educational forces that impel teachers toward standardization, ranking, deadlines, and prescriptive learning. This support was the most powerful influence in shaping or reshaping our classroom practice.

7.1.2. Other professional growth

Our group also acknowledged professional growth that occurred outside the classroom, particularly in two areas. One example, articulated by both Dara and Kate, involved increased or deepened collaboration with staff colleagues.

Dara: I learned a lot about collaboration—about how valuable collaboration is. And how you can have individual ideas, and you can throw them out there and

we would validate them, explore them... That to me was the process that was happening in our meetings—and then together we would create something. And now, well, I take it to the staff. That's something that came out. It does take extra planning, but it's so rewarding in the end... for the students... and for me.

Kate: It's just a fact that we all really need each other, to talk and to share. I've taken that back to my colleagues, and when we're talking I just keep trying to articulate that to them—especially if they're younger, newer colleagues... we *have* to stick together. We have to just validate that for each other because no one else gets it.

Our experience of leisurely, prolonged, and probing conversations heightened our awareness of the feelings of isolation and the lack of opportunities for meaningful collaboration in our daily teaching contexts. A second kind of change we acknowledged involved new attitudes toward reflection. For all of us, reflection had become more of priority—it became, in fact, a desire rather than a duty or another item on our long lists of 'shoulds'. Dara raised the importance and the frequency of reflection in her teaching life; she felt liberated to undertake it in modes other than writing.

Dara: And also the way I reflect—and I want them to reflect—it changed, because I realize how important the reflection is. Which is something I think I missed as not as valuable... So when I finish my teaching day I will sometimes sit down and either write... or sometimes I just 'plasticine' (*gesture*) and just start to create and to come out with feelings. It really cements what I was doing in the class and where I can go... and I've never done that before. So I really got something out of that, that way.

Kate experienced deeper self-questioning and analysis of her own stance in relation to standard educational expectations.

Kate: The group gave me the chance to really try to get under my own expectations of myself and of the education system as it stands. Like, 'Do I really believe this is the right way to do it? Or am I doing it just because I *think* this is the right way to do it?' I still don't really know why I do some of the things I do—I still do not have a really clear view of that. ...So having the time to really process my methods and approaches—it just gave me a lot of room to really think that through and to think where I might be lacking. 'OK, all right—I think that I am lacking there, so that's good. I know that now for myself—yeah, it's a bit disappointing, but so what? It feels solid, and now I can take action'. It's a clearer insight.

We also discussed why it was so hard for us (and our colleagues) to fit some kind of reflection into our daily practice. This was a problem we certainly did not fully solve. As I tried to illustrate in the monologue at the opening of this thesis, the demands of curriculum, students' (or their parents') needs, and staff obligations fill the working day long after the students have departed, and while those duties are being discharged, pressures of family, household, wellness, or social life are hovering over our shoulders, waiting to fill the rest of the day. For us, the choice to designate specific times to meet together (hospitably, i.e., not in the workplace) and to add an element of creative expression to our collaboration meant that reflection became a welcome obligation—and more frequent and more varied, as a result. Both Dara and Kate commented on how this worked for them, expressing once again—as I have heard so many times from so many teachers—the desire for *workplace* opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, and reflection.

Kate: I think I found our meetings as a kind of 'resting place'—inasmuch as we were digging and looking and working in our conversations... Having that hour and half of all the storytelling and all that. That part of what we did—I can't imagine not having that, to be honest with you. And I think I try to get it in my work day, but we don't have the time or we don't maybe have the construct. It kind of gets lost... one moment we're having a philosophical discussion and the next minute it's like 'can we just get through this checklist?'. You never really get a sense of completion.

Dara: The problem is the time constraint. You're under the gun on time, all the time. But once I think "Ah, I've got to do this" I make the time, and once I'm immersed in that, time stops! That's the irony of it. You become 'in your element'. I needed the collaboration of this group to bounce the ideas off of. Now I can go into myself and say "Oh, I could use this [*medium*] to do this... I could do it this way" and then I can bring whatever I'm confused about to our group again. And then we work it through, and then I've got something to take back, and I think that's what's missing in our education system is that 'group'—we need to get collaborative people in similar or different grade groups together to reflect on practices. I don't know how we're going to do that, but that needs to be there.

From the beginning we had readily acknowledged that there were large problems we could not solve, and our intent was to help each other find ways of coping or establishing a stance in relation to these difficulties. As Cheryl pointed out “there was a lot of teaching experience in the group”, and pedagogical expertise was not the focus of our inquiries, but we all acknowledged that our practice had grown in certain directions

through our shared experience. In the end, however, these changes in practice were not the most significant or most valued benefits of our group experience.

7.1.3. Creativity, artistic expression, and identity affirmation

The interviews at the end of the study confirmed what our various conversations and texts had been suggesting all along: that using aesthetic modes of expression had been profoundly important not only in expanding our reflective repertoire and strengthening our commitment to reflection but also in building the sense of community and trust that facilitated both personal and professional growth. The primary benefit identified by every member of the group was the friendship that grew out of what began as a professional collaboration. The importance of trust and affirmation, balanced by challenge and ‘holding to account’ is recognized as vital in teacher education (Cohen et al., 2012; Ling & Bullock, 2014; Rogers & Scott, 2008). In their survey of successful teacher education programs, Rogers and Scott found several common elements: an atmosphere that balanced validation and challenge, time and space devoted to reflection, a community of trust, and opportunities to make sense of experiences through story-telling. Michael Ling (2014) expresses what I have heard so often from so many teachers and what our group experience exemplified:

The act of getting together with my colleague to consistently, and yet organically, engage with each other, around readings, around conceptual and theoretical matters, around our tensions...has brought me to a recognition that the practice must always involve this collegial and dialogical element. (Ling & Bullock, 2014, p. 137)

References to feelings of support and affirmation were often reiterated throughout our conversations and texts as the prime reason our association endured over three years, and the importance of this ‘community of trust’ was independently stated by each group member during their interviews. Dara, Cheryl and I each described this explicitly:

Dara: So we were looking at dilemmas that we all had in common in education, but through this process we became very good friends and we developed a trust, so that we could discuss anything—in any format. And I trusted that I could do that and I trusted that it would be received. I often wondered as I drove in to our meetings “What’s going to happen?” but something magical always did!... I kind of hemmed and hawed at first—when you first

invited me—but I'm so happy. It was so enriching. *[It felt like a really] safe place that we found to express ideas, our feelings about life, our education and just to validate our selves as teachers and as women. And the 'real you'—the authentic thing—to be validated...is amazing.*

Kathy: The main benefit for me has been the affirmation from and friendship with three women I respect and like and trust on a deep level. Obviously I have also benefitted in that the group has provided me with a wonderful (fun!) setting for learning to do research. And another way I have grown is that my feminist perspective has been reinforced and allowed freer expression. I understand myself better and my own need to connect with like-minded others, especially women.

Cheryl: The validation would be at the top of the list *[of benefits]*. In the beginning I thought, 'mmhmm, this is fun—good food, great people... This is going to be great fun'. And then the surprise for me was eventually the validation for my own academic work. I didn't feel I had a place up on the hill *[note: SFU campus is at the top of a mountain]...but I had a place here.* Sharing with peers and collaborating artistically, I felt I had a place for inquiry. Our barriers fell away very quickly. We were collectively ready to get into our issues. We were each in a place where we wanted this open space...I wanted an academic setting where we might discuss readings and explore artistic expression about ideas—arts-based inquiry into ideas about arts education. I thought that we would learn from each other and that definitely has happened. I have received feedback about my work, and the process of setting tasks and then sharing the work that we do has shown me ways that this inquiry works.

In different ways, we each felt supported and “validated” and strengthened most particularly in areas of our lives where we felt isolated, where our values were challenged and our identities were difficult to define or sustain—as believers in the value of aesthetic expression, as critical teachers swimming upstream against educational practices or expectations that we did not agree with, or as working teachers in graduate school.

As teachers we shared a commitment to allowing students to step outside 'prescribed learning outcomes' and direct their own learning, a desire to challenge the supremacy of print literacy, and a belief in the need to respond intuitively in those moments that seem to demand a sudden change of course. These commitments arose from a shared vision of teaching that often came under attack for us—through, for example, media depictions of teachers as cruel, uncaring, lazy, rigid, stupid or self-serving, through disempowering demands for high-stakes testing, long lists of expected

outcomes or rigidly defined standards, and through political views that defined teachers as “deskilled” technicians rather than designers (Kincheloe, 2003). Sharing our conversations and artwork together strengthened our sometimes beleaguered grip on our vision of what it meant to teach with commitment and integrity and introduced metaphors that served as vivid and concise representations of our shared beliefs, values, and experiences. As Cheryl expressed it: “When you feel validated about your work and your beliefs then you do feel that you have a place and you have the confidence to claim it”.

For Cheryl and myself, the group’s affirming influence extended beyond our teaching identities and included our emerging identities as researchers. Our experience of our doctoral programs was at least as ‘disciplining’ (Zembylas, 2003) as teaching in the school system. Ways of being that we valued highly in our own lives and educational practice seemed to be marginalized or dismissed in the academic world; we identified with Jane Munro’s perception (Butterwick, Dawson, & Munro, 2007): “It became clear that...creativity, collaboration, and candour were ‘frills” (p. 4), and Zembylas’s observations of school culture matched our university experiences precisely:

The emotional rules developed in [graduate] schools and legitimated through the exercise of power are used to ‘govern’ [teachers/students] by putting limits on their emotional expressions in order to ‘normalize’ them and thus turn appropriate behaviour into a set of skills, desirable outcomes, and dispositions that can be used to examine and evaluate them. (Zembylas, 2003, p. 123)

In spite of having confidently enjoyed and succeeded in our Masters programs some years earlier, both Cheryl and I often felt uncomfortable, ‘out of place’, and misunderstood in our doctoral classes. We shared these feelings with the group one evening:

Kathy: I feel like I’ve been having a kind of *metaphorical* experience of what it is to be an immigrant. To want to enter this new world, but to be told that in order to enter it you have to let go of a whole lot of stuff that you used to be or used to value. It’s not my native country. And it’s not...I don’t totally accept the way they run this country....that culture... I don’t buy into it altogether. It’s too competitive, too judgmental, and too... too disembodied.

Cheryl: Oh, very disembodied.

Kathy: I want to hang onto some of who I was. But I would also like entry into it... I love the learning. I want to be able to go there, have access to that, and then go back, sort of. And in a way, I think that's what I've been trying to do in this PhD, but it's really not set up for those little excursions. You've got to go there and ... become one.

Cheryl: And even if you think you're not becoming one, you can't help but become something different... from what you were when you started...

Kathy: Yes, and that worries me. People see you differently—it changes your relationships sometimes, and not always for the better. I've known marriages to break up. I'm working hard to keep my family functioning like normal, not to drop my usual responsibilities, even though I'm doing all this extra reading and writing. And I've seen people I know become PhDs and ... I ended up not liking them as much as I used to like them. They're different. I worry about that happening to me.

I did not use the metaphor of 'immigrant' lightly. I felt a strong identification with the sense of displacement described by applied linguistics scholar Roumiana Ilieva (1997) on her immigration to Canada after years of studying English language and Canadian culture in her native Bulgaria. Like her, I felt securely acquainted with the 'languages' and expectations of this new world I was entering: "I expected I would have few difficulties in coping with the new environment" (Ilieva, 1997, p. 2); however, like her, I found myself often confused or surprised by responses of others. It was very clear to Cheryl and to me that, despite the fact that teachers and education researchers share a common interest in the development of good educational principles and practices, there is a broad cultural gap between those two worlds—and there are many pitfalls for a teacher attempting to cross that gap. Regardless of how well prepared we felt by our Masters degrees, we nevertheless found ourselves "affected in our verbal and non-verbal behaviour in our new environment by the conceptualizations and understandings of the world we have developed in our socialization (or enculturation) in a specific community" (Ilieva, 1997, p. 3).

Cheryl: I didn't need to know how to teach, after 33 years of teaching—but I was trying to write a thesis about the work that I knew—about the photography that I had. I had the research, but I needed to understand it as methodology. And I didn't—it took a long time to go from practitioner to theoretician, but this group came along at the point where I was trying to frame all that, so it was really helpful to me in doing that. This has become a

place where I can bring ideas like my comprehensive exam work and receive feedback. Lots of times I was feeling like I had to fit into other paradigms—‘how can I fit into all these other ‘methods?’... but now it’s like: ‘No. This is what I know—what theory supports what I know?’ so it changed my perspective on my own research. It’s a perspective shift.

Also, as a woman this has been a validating experience ... My understanding of what it means to be a woman in academia has shifted to one of acceptance of the ways women know things. It has validated the feelings I have about some negative experiences with male students and male professors in my graduate classes. I have come to understand the dynamic of power struggles that exist in academia, from my perspective, and that the experience of women in academia should be one where the ways that women are and experience the world and learn and socialize are validated.

Simply expressing these feelings in our little group, and having the sense of being listened to and understood, provided support. As with our conversations about teaching, we were not looking for solutions to problems that we understood were far bigger than our own individual experiences in these complex worlds. But we embraced the opportunity for a safe and affirming context—a “resting place”, as Kate put it—in which we could express doubts, fears, questions and dreams as graduate students, just as we did in our conversations as arts-based, critical-minded teachers. Having that refuge was a key element in helping Cheryl and me cope with the challenges of gaining entry into the academic world and defining our identities as teacher-inquirers.

Our use of arts-based expressions, in this setting of comfort and trust, both depended on *and* contributed to feelings of trust and intimacy for all of us. The feeling of safety created through intimate dialogue and hospitable setting allowed for the ‘risky’ sharing of poems and art work or other exploratory, interpretive offerings...and those communications, in turn, deepened the intimacy and trust. There was a level of courage required to share a poem or a visual art piece or to participate in a movement activity, but we had built a groundwork of safety and acceptance that allowed us to embrace those risks and afterward to feel even more inspired and connected.

Dara: I felt like I could dig deep and bring out things that meant something to me—in my authentic voice I could speak it, and feel safe enough to be heard. Sometimes it was not purely wonderful—sometimes it was scary... so taking a risk, and coming out the other side was amazing—and just trusting that it was going to be OK.

Kate: I was most satisfied when I was able to take those conversations that we had—you know the stories... I was most satisfied when I was able to take that experience of sharing those thoughts, ideas, feelings and put them into some form that felt rich and complete. That felt very satisfying for me. ... There was always that little carrot dangling, that invitation and these opportunities. So I went 'wow'—this is amazing. After these big rich conversations I can then go *here*... that does something to me, that does change me, that does enrich the whole experience. So when there were times when I didn't do that, or I got too busy in my own life and I when I didn't paint or dance or draw or write, I look back and I think 'Oh, I wish I had... I want to do more of that, I yearn to do more of that'.

Kathy: Those creative projects required some courage but also made me *want* to explore more. I felt safe and therefore able to step out into unknown territory or territory where I felt pretty incompetent. The zestful nature of that kind of exploration has transferred somewhat into other aspects of my life: I'm more willing to be less methodical, less 'perfectly prepared' and more confident that I will be able to improvise in front of a class.

Cheryl: And a way of being for all of us in the group was knowing ourselves through artistic expression. For most of our sessions—we had a prompt, an artistic prompt, and we would either do a writing or... sew a cape (*smiling*) or photography. And it was the things that were happening in our lives that would fit into this prompt, so we would bring these together and share them... and these were incredibly rich. And because we knew each other, we were able to understand the personal connections [Kathy: to that artifact] yes, and the stories behind them.

The aesthetic form we experimented with the most was poetry—partly because it required no special equipment or facility but also because we all enjoyed it (to varying degrees). I think, to some extent, both Dara and I were swept along by the enthusiasm of Kate and Cheryl and the way poetry just seemed to spill out of them so easily and so meaningfully. For Cheryl, it was simply a necessity: “Poetry just says things that other ways of being don't. It's just a unique way of being”. For me, it was often a struggle, but a worthwhile one:

Kathy: I love words, and I love trying to make them do what I want, but my natural 'bent' as a writer is much more linear than poetry. I don't *think* poetically, most of the time. So writing poems was a real challenge—and only moderately successful—but I really liked trying it. I found it easier to write about deeply personal subjects than about teaching. But I made myself try to write a poem about teaching. It was a definite struggle, and I think that shows in the final version—a certain 'forced'-ness to it—but it was a good exercise and it took my thinking about teaching into a direction that I had not anticipated. That's what working in a different genre or literacy can do,

and that insight reinforced my belief in the value of utilizing alternate literacies and modes in reflection and education.

For Kate, poetry was both personally and professionally transformative:

Kate: It's opened my eyes to how learning can come out of a seemingly little thing—like that poem that I wrote in our early days...that was significant for me. When I wrote that poem, *Sisters of Yemaya*, that was a very changing event for me. I went to creative places I couldn't have gone without those conversations we had. I think I just want to remember that, and I feel more motivated to remember that in my classroom with my students. We don't have to make it a worksheet; it doesn't have to be that concrete closed activity. We have other experiences and other ways of integrating learning and relationships and discussions... that I might not ever recognize as a teacher—I might not know that that child is painting something and they're somehow integrating the conversation that we had about soil yesterday. But I have to keep giving them the opportunity to do that, and I think I'm more inclined to do that now than I might have been, because I've had my own taste of it.

Our creative work served both as a way to process, respond to, integrate or articulate new insights *after* our conversations, and also to introduce *into* the conversations feelings or ideas that might otherwise have been left unsaid, further deepening the conversations. In general, engaging with artistic forms was crucial to our intimacy and trust, to affirming our multiple identities as teachers and women with something to say... and therefore to supporting our inclination to explore challenging issues in our professional lives.

7.2. Losses...?

There seems to be ample evidence that we enjoyed and found meaning in our shared experience, but is it possible that our chosen path led us to bypass some benefits available through more traditional approaches to reflection? Was there anything we might have lost or missed out on? Could we, perhaps, have been more critical-minded? That is a question I am still pondering. We were certainly critically aware, and we did take steps to address inequities in our classroom work, particularly by using the arts as tools for providing equity in learning and representation of learning. We did not, however, have the kind of problem-specific and focused critical agenda that defines

many forms of action-based inquiry. Wishing to hear the groups' views on this, I invited comments during the interviews on any hopes or needs that were left unfulfilled. We were not unanimous on this. Two of us felt that the experience had given more than it had promised in the beginning; what had appeared at first to be simply pleasant and fun—or possibly risky—had turned out to be deeply rewarding on several levels and couldn't have been improved. However, two of us felt something had been missed—specifically, the kind of assumption-shattering, world-shaking insights that we had experienced during our graduate studies programs. Kate described this at her interview:

Kate: There's something...I...hmmm...I still feel like we didn't quite get there, you know? I don't even know where 'there' is, you know? But there's something...eluding us. Sharing and talking and discussing and wondering and exploring and reflecting...really, really, really important. That alone is really powerful—and the creative element: huge. But there's still something that we didn't quite get to, yet. ... I want to be a part of a big earth-shattering moment. Hopefully we're all part of something so that when it bursts open we all know. Why do we want that!?? We yearn for that—'rattle my world'! (*laughing*) Like, what the hell is that about?

I, too, felt something of what Kate describes and have given much thought to why such a quest remained unfulfilled. I think there are two reasons: one is that this “yearning” for world-rattling insights was not shared by everyone in the group: although we were in three or four key ways a somewhat homogeneous group, we were nevertheless four individuals at different stages in our careers with very different histories and many differences in needs, desires, and interests. There are times in anyone's life when a big shift in perspective would require too much adjustment, and we shy away from confronting such a dramatic change; but there are other times when such cognitive reorganizing is welcome, when we feel ready to embrace a challenge to our worldview. I don't think any group, even one as small as ours, can ever be co-ordinated so those moments arrive simultaneously for everyone. A second reason is, I believe, that the leadership of the group was distributed between us, and the focus of the group was broadly defined. Because each of us already had an established direction for inquiry in our own practice, and because our lives were already so full, the idea of committing as well to a shared inquiry—while attractive—ultimately felt more like a burden than a blessing. Kate wondered whether defining a goal or an inquiry “that could drive this time together” or “doing way more art—way more expression” might have taken us to that place that she was seeking, and although I am not quite sure, I suspect that if one of us

had articulated that goal and taken the lead in that direction, there would have been no resistance. That would have been a very different kind of collaboration, however, and a very different experience altogether. I see this issue as highlighting the points made by Rodgers and Scott (2008) regarding the need for a balance between support and challenge in teacher education: too much challenge can be “toxic” and can lead to disengagement; too much support without challenge can lead to “stasis”. They also point out that “what one person (teacher) may experience as support may be experienced as challenge by another, and vice versa” (p. 743), so there can never be a universally perfect fit in any collective setting or program.

I think the evidence is quite clear that in our collaboration the balance leaned more often toward affirmation. Outside the group, individually, we were experiencing daily challenges in our classroom work, private lives, and graduate studies; within the group, collectively, we often set ourselves challenges, but they were more often in the realm of artistic growth, tackling new forms of expression and sharing the results. While I believe with many scholars that aesthetic engagements can lead to horizon-broadening insights (Dewey, 1934; Eisner, 1998, 2002; Greene, 1995; Leavy, 2009; Ozick, 1992; Patteson, 1999; Porath, 2012; Shusterman, 2012; Swanwick, 2007), I accept that our group could not commit the time, energy, focus, and concentrated practice necessary to reach the level of aesthetic proficiency that leads to grand, transcendental insights. As J. J. Schwab (1983) has pointed out, “Every art...has rules, but knowledge of the rules does not make one an artist” (Schwab, 1983, p. 265). I also believe that delving more systematically into critical theoretical work and linking it with our practical wisdom might have provided the kind of cognitive-dissonance that Kate was seeking. We did read some articles together, and these were effective in stimulating our thinking and our conversation, but the video records show less energy and more aloof engagement during these conversations. None of our creative work was inspired by a reading, although Cheryl’s poem “Draft of Academia” does allude to one. The kind of growth that Kate described would have required us to commit to following a particular trajectory of theoretical inquiry with some consistency and depth—a very different kind of energy than the kind of energy demanded (and generated) by artistic engagement.

So how do I make sense of this ‘unfulfilled’ aspect of our collaboration? I have arrived at two conclusions on this issue: one is that I believe it would be impossible to

find the perfect balance of challenge and support for *everyone* in the group—even as small as it was. What was challenging for some was affirming for others. I also accept that what you may gain on the swings you can lose on the roundabouts: there are gains and losses to be had in any worthwhile human experience. The different energies of intellectual study and art-making, the freedom of shared leadership and self-defined goals compared to the rigours of a single collaborative inquiry, the relative values of process and of product... each has its worth and its cost, and each had a place in our collaboration. I interpret our experience in the same light as Avraham Cohen's (2012) account of the experience of six education scholars who met regularly to discuss their teaching in a group similar to our own:

Our meetings have been stimulating, creative, encouraging, and supportive. ...It is my strong impression that we have had the kinds of conversations that professors don't usually have with their colleagues....We were integrating what is usually viewed as dissociated and/or adversarial dimensions in the academy, and elsewhere: intellectual versus emotional and the somatic, critical versus creative, and professional versus personal, theoretical versus contemplative.

These conversations have been both personal and scholarly, and most importantly, in my view, integrate the personal and the scholarly. The quality of the group was expressed, from the beginning, as a vivifying energy that seems ever-present when we are together. (Cohen, 2012b, p. 4)

For us, as for Cohen's group, the collaboration took the shape it needed to take at this point in our professional and private lives. Having the freedom to define our reflective discourse for ourselves—blending meaningful and fitting elements of academic or professional discourse where and how we found useful—allowed us to create a context for kinds of inquiry that we could not have pursued under any other conditions. Our study experience has not provided us with answers to the dilemmas we experienced in teaching, but it has given us new ways to think about education in general and teaching in particular, about ourselves, about the arts, and about reflection. And more precious than answers, this group has been a source of courage enabling us to question assumptions, to hold true to our beliefs, and to keep seeking.

Assessing the benefits and losses of this approach to teacher reflection suggests several potential directions for future research. Were I to undertake a similar study

again, I would give serious consideration to pursuing our original idea of creating a culminating performance or presentation. Preparing a public presentation requires participants to wrestle with meaning-making to a uniquely intense degree and deepens the collaborative relationship—but it would also require a somewhat larger group. Increasing the group size and diversity would make a performance more feasible and would enrich the collaboration with wider perspectives. I would further propose democratically deciding on a theme or issue and integrating relevant theoretical material in a more focused way into our discussions; perhaps each group member could take responsibility for researching, selecting, and introducing a reading on the chosen theme. Such options would, I believe, deepen the experience without impinging on those benefits we all identified so strongly and which, I would argue, need to be given serious consideration in any iteration of reflective practice.

Chapter 8.

Implications

This study has taken my thinking, my teaching, and my understanding of research in many directions—as it has done for our entire group. But I wonder: *Does our story hold any interest or value for others, outside our group? Does our experience have any implications beyond our little group?* I do think there is a story here about teaching, about teachers, about thinking through the arts/thinking multimodally and thinking through the body—a message about recognizing different ways of knowing the world and how those different ways of knowing and making meaning have a place in both teaching *and* research. I think there is also a story about relationships and about how women work best. Remembering Elliot Eisner’s wise words, however, “The making of a fine meal does not require the use of everything in the pantry” (Eisner, 1998, p. 90), I will close this dissertation by focusing on the central issue that started it all: *What insights, if any, does this study offer regarding teacher reflective practice?* I think there are three:

[1] **Reflection is a situated practice.** I want to suggest that reflection is responsive to the social context in which it occurs, and what might appear from an academic perspective to be an absence of reflection, or superficial reflection, in the field, might instead be an example of reflection in a different ‘register’. In the same way that other cultural practices are recognized as situated—for example, learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or literacy (Barton & Hamilton, 2000)—I see reflection not as an autonomous or essentialized cognitive process but rather as an activity defined by social, political, and cultural influences, sustained and positioned by institutions and power relations. From this perspective, reflection takes place not in the disembodied head of the reflector but in the social activity of communities of practitioners. As many scholars have noted (Butterwick, et al, 2007; Colbeck, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2008; Fendler, 2003; Gitlin, 2008; Hökkä, Eteläpelto, & Rasku-Puttonen, 2012; Murray &

Aymer, 2009) and as my research supports, schools and universities—although they are both educational institutions—provide widely divergent settings for defining and engaging in reflective practice. What counts as social or symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984) in schools is often quite different from the capital(s) circulating in universities, as are the valued personal qualities, skills and resources available in each community. Because a professional teaching credential currently depends on university endorsement, professional qualification requires meeting ‘university standards’ of performance. These standards emphasize rational argument, solo performance, literacy in a narrow range of print-centred linguistic genres, and familiarity with educational research. All of these things make important contributions to the education of teachers, but effective pedagogy requires much more that these ‘standards’ do not acknowledge. In the world of teaching, the currency is ‘relationships’. A school teacher needs to be able to relate easily to large groups of students and to be able to create a sense of community in a classroom as well as being able to ‘read’ and respond effectively to individual students. Knowing how and when to inspire, to entertain, to lead, to walk alongside, to push, to wait, to question, to accept, to get excited, to stay calm, to nudge, to plead, to bribe, to demand, to laugh, to frown, to ignore, to praise, to listen, to tell, to show, to offer, to carry on, to stop, to promise, to threaten, to remember, to forget, to stick to the plan, to improvise... These are some of what I would call literacies of teaching—insofar as these are pedagogical strategies or techniques, they can be introduced, discussed, and developed to a limited degree in a university context where novice teachers are positioned as students-being-taught-by-an-expert and experienced teachers are often assessed on the basis of their reflective writing; the full development of a school teacher, however, must take place in the world of schools. In that setting, positioned as apprenticing-teachers or fully-fledged teachers working in the context of a relationship with students, they are able to move beyond a mechanical or formulaic application of ‘strategies’ to develop these literacies as fully embodied intuitive interpersonal capacities. In this world, reflection is not anchored to theoretical questions or concerns; it arises from the very concrete conditions in the lives of teachers and students. It should not be difficult to accept that reflective practice in the field may be enacted quite differently from reflective practice in a university context.

[2] Teacher reflective practice benefits from the freedom to range freely between identities and life experiences rather than being limited to analysis of

educational theory, philosophy or classroom experience. Our group's experience suggests that teacher reflection fulfills various purposes—some immediate and instrumental, others more abstract or long-term—and that professional reflection (and performance) is enriched by opportunities to integrate elements of a teacher's complex identities. Our multiple identities were intertwined, and we could not excise those perspectives and knowledges from our discourse. Sharing our experiences and feelings from our complex and multiple stances felt *necessary*, for two reasons. One was that storytelling allowed us to work through challenging experiences dialogically: "Through narration, people construct their identity, that is, they integrate old and new experiences, identify the ordinary and the exceptional, and give personal accounts expressing their intentions, interpretations, and evaluations in coherent chains of events" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 313). Such storytelling also served to integrate our multiple identities into a single coherent whole: "Personal continuity of self is warranted by narration, taking place both within the self and in the form of verbal accounts to others. Through these dialogues, meaningful experiences are organized into one narrative structured system: the self-narrative" (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 313). I think the *dialogical* nature of this process was also important. In sharing our thoughts, feelings and experiences (in whatever mode we chose), we could always count on a response (and a supportive one, in fact). All our communications occurred in the context of conversations, opening up the possibility of unexpected perspectives and alternative ways of acting. The effect of being reliably responded to felt very different from filling many pages of a journal that no one would ever see. As Kress (2011) has pointed out: "Without interaction (as communication) there is no meaning-making, no (change to) knowledge, no learning" (Kress, 2011, p. 213). I would not underestimate the importance of ongoing responsive dialogue as an element of reflection that aims to change "the ways in which teachers interpret educational matters [or] constitute new forms of teacher subjectivity" (Zembylas, 2003, pp. 125-126). One of the reasons for our group's success and longevity was, I believe, that we allowed the relational nature of teaching to inform our model of reflection.

[3] Teacher reflective practice can benefit from a multimodal approach. In bringing the arts into our reflective practice, we were aligning ourselves with scholarship that questioned the justice and wisdom of privileging academic epistemology to the

exclusion of alternative ways of understanding the world. We shared Andrew Gitlin's perception regarding the "valorization" of academic rationality:

There is a sense in many societies, especially those of a Western persuasion, that reason is the only path toward progress. ... The 'problem', if you will, with reason as the only path toward progress is that this orientation is likely to keep many of the traditions anchored to the past because alternative forms of knowing, such as more intuitive or holistic ways of knowing, that might produce unexpected insights and understanding, will at best be under-utilized, thereby limiting the innovative nature of knowledge to push cultural practices forward. (Gitlin, 2008, p. 632)

It was liberating to free ourselves from the academic emphasis on rational analysis and written expression. By approaching our reflections multimodally, we opened the door to figurative, imaginative, and intuitive ways of thinking about and looking at our lives and practices and to modes of expression that were challenging, fun, and new—a fact that I am convinced contributed to the length of our collaboration. In our emotionally safe environment, we discovered that we—and our topics—were each suited to some modes of expression over others. As we approached each text, it seemed logical to select a mode of expression that was most "apt" for the "meaning we wished to realize" (Bezemer & Kress, 2008), pushing ourselves to expand our expressive repertoires when it felt safe and fitting to do so. I see these excursions into alternate modes of expression as crucial and effective elements of our efforts to be attentive to our daily lives. Approaching our reflective practice multimodally moved us toward what Richard Shusterman has called "the awakened life". "The attractive shaping of our lives as an art of living could also be enriched by greater perceptual awareness of aesthetic meanings, feelings, and potentials in our everyday conduct of life" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 3). He argues that somatically aware engagement in the arts helps us "to live in a waking rather than sleeping state" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 289). I have already noted the substantial scholarly support for the power of aesthetic engagement to "jar people into seeing things differently, to transcend differences, and to foster connections" (Leavy, 2009, p. viii). Developing a "keener, more focused consciousness in our everyday living" (Shusterman, 2012, p. 296) seems to me to be the goal of any model of reflective practice and supports the use of multimodal approaches to reflection. As Maxine Greene so

succinctly put it: “Communities of the wide-awake may take shape, even in the corridors of schools” (Greene, 1995, p. 150).

Conclusion

No need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience. ~Jack Mezirow

In undertaking this dissertation, I have hoped to accomplish several things. First, I want to reinforce the case for the richness of thinking in media other than prose and to align myself with those who claim that rational analysis and intellectual rigour are not the only paths to useful insights and new understandings for teachers: there are many ways of making meaning—many literacies—and many rigours. Second, I want to add my voice to those who see research less as a practice and more as a way of living reflectively, artfully and bodily—wide awake and attentive. And finally, I want the world to hear the voices of the women who shared this journey with me with such honesty and intimacy; I want the world to know that out there in the “flawed universe” of schools there are teachers who care deeply and who teach reflectively, critically, courageously, and creatively.

17. Lyric by Kathy

If I could
I would write a song

Ostinato rhythms of seasons,
Semesters, closings and openings
Syncopations
Pulse, breath
Feet meeting earth
Arrivings and departures

Cadenzas of laughter
Arpeggios of empathy
Improvisations
In a homespun key

It would be a song about
The wisdom of pale amber tea in a fine cup
About flowing things—rivers, words, blood, and
The whisper of cloth slipping and billowing
Around a body as it carves a name in space

It would be a song in four parts
Over a basso-continuo of light dying in the evening sky
And staccato interjections from a merry fire
Four women singing the memory of teaching
How it lingers on the tongue like dark chocolate—rich, melting
Sweet and bitter
Leaving traces of a desire not quite fulfilled

If I could
I would write a song
For four sisters to sing their harmonies into light

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Appendix A.

Semi-structured interview questions

1. How would you label in your own words the process we have undertaken in the past 2 years? What would you call what we did together?
2. What would you identify as the focus of the meetings?
3. What has it meant to you to be part of this group? This group *process*?
4. What events/moments/memories stand out? Why?
5. Describe the benefits you feel you have gained through your participation in this group. Would you say, for instance, that you have grown as a result of this experience? In what ways?
6. What did this process seem to promise in the beginning but did not fulfil? In what ways has it been disappointing or frustrating? Or what do you think was missing?
7. Describe any moments/experiences of tension, discomfort, or conflict that you experienced.
8. What has surprised you about this experience?
9. What beliefs/values did this experience confirm for you?
10. What beliefs/values were challenged or changed?
11. Has your teaching practice changed as a result of your participation in this group? If so, describe those changes...
12. We expressed ourselves individually through various aesthetic media: dance, photography (both original and 'found' images), drama, visual art, writing (narrative, poetry), talk... Which of these media did you find most effective for yourself? What subjects did you explore through these media? [were they mostly about teaching? Or about other aspects of your life?]
13. We also *co-created* through various media: dance, photography (both original and 'found' images), visual art, food... Which of these artistic processes was most satisfying and effective for you?
14. Did these artistic endeavours influence your teaching practice? How? Did these experiences influence other aspects of your life? Explain...
15. Would you participate in this sort of group again? What would you hope to gain? What would make you decide to say no? What changes would you recommend/make in a future experience like this?
16. Aside from talking, what artistic medium/media would you choose in order to express your responses to these questions or to describe your

feelings/reflections on this 2-year experience? What would the other medium/media offer that just talking does not?