RITUAL AS PURPOSEFUL PEDAGOGY

by

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Ritual as Purposeful Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

The practice which supported my most successful years teaching was the use of ritual activity with children. I did not know that then, however. It has been this research—the application of "experimental writing" to the question: what is the experience of ritual as pedagogy?—which has provided me with this clearer understanding of my teaching practice.

Ritual, the making of ordinary experiences into extraordinary events, occurs in our daily lives often without much recognition yet with a profound effect upon relationships with others and things, memory and knowledge, and interpretation and understanding of lived experiences.

Rituals are ordered around our use of symbols; objects, gestures, form and location. Objects—usually as innocuous as a special coffee mug or a grandparent's old fishing rod—are those meaningful, concrete, symbols, when made part of ritual activity become locations for interpretation. Gesture, the symbolic language used to express what is understood just beyond the use of words is the language our bodies use to express the form the ritual takes. The symbolic coming together of object, location, gesture, and form provides a context for the ritual to occur and is the connective tissue which creates a sense of spontaneous combustion; the puff of smoke and a flash of light which transforms the moment. The classroom is a place for completing written work one moment, and then, it is transformed by a story or song into a location for ritual to occur. This transformation, brought about by a hermeneutic understanding and reordering of the events, changes the ordinary into the extraordinary and allows us to see what previously we couldn't see.

Ritual is easily expressed in the language of children. It is like a memory-box, when opened, each object rediscovered, holds particular

memories and meaning still clear and strong even when so much else is forgotten. Each object is ordered and considered in the light of what we have experienced since last the box was opened.

Ritual offers a framework, a language and a location for meaningful experience. And it is practiced by many teachers. It is this framework, language, location and practice that is the keynote of this research.

For my mother,
Faith Sinclair Scholefield,
who was the source of most of my family's rituals,
and who is still a part of mine.

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I don't think I could have conceptualized the idea if Kau'i Keliipio hadn't sent me off to Hawaii to visit Elly Tepper. I thank Kau'i for her energy and insight and Elly Tepper for knowing what I needed.

This journey might have ended up in a very different and much less interesting place if I had been left on my own. However, I was extremely fortunate to be guided, directed, braced up and believed in by Dennis Sumara, my Faculty Advisor. I am profoundly grateful for his time, his thoughtfulness and his passion from the beginning to the very end of this project.

This might have taken years to complete had it not been for the financial support of Simon Fraser University and the Vancouver School Board Educational Leave Fund which made it possible to take two months so I could write full time.

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It seemed at times that this work was all I wanted to think about. I deeply appreciate those friends and family who encouraged and endured conversations related to this research, over dinner, the phone, at the ball field and around the campfire.

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I never really expected to do this. Debra Trca was convinced that I could and that belief, more than the hot meals on the table, the grocery shopping done and the mowed lawn, kept me at it. The time she made for my work in her busy life is incalculable. Her genuine regard for my research, her enthusiasm and persistence supported me. Her editing, opinions and honesty made it a stronger piece of writing. There is no new wardrobe big enough to express my love and appreciation.

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INTRODUCTION

Writing about ritual has been like writing about the concentric circles made by a stone when tossed into a pool of water. I thought it all began with the stone ... until it touched the water. Then suddenly and briefly it became the middle defined only by the ripples it left behind. The middle vanished; I only knew where it was by the circles that moved out from it. This relationship between the stone and the pool is one of the ways I think about ritual; I know it is there because of what is left behind. What remains are recollections: the way I remember the event. No substance remains, only the consequences of its being there. And even if I were to search for and find the stone, it is only the artifact, not the thing itself. Yet it is substantial for it has the weight and shape of the memories gathered around it. Each circle moving slowly outward would hold something remembered, and with that, some meaning. In my hand would be this stone but it would no longer be the same as the stone I threw because I now know it to be different. Ritual is like this. It has weight and substance yet it is invisible. Ritual is both the center where the stone impacted the water and the circles which define it. When I began to understand the stone in relation to the water and the slowly moving circles I realized that this thesis would be an endeavour to understand the center without seeing it. I would be the conjurer, making visible what is invisible. In order to explain, I needed to write around the edges—understanding it by its absence. All my subsequent writing seemed to start in the middle and I would find myself writing out in order to understand what the middle was all about. This kind of inquiry became my research—both data and methodology—and I will attempt to describe them both in the next chapter.

The chapter will unfold a little wrinkled without sharp creases to define it. However, gathered into the folds of the fabric of this work are

distinct and luminous threads which, when followed, help define and reinforce the work. For this is not as I had initially intended, a ready-to-wear thesis. It is the unfolding of an idea by examining the threads that make up the piece. I begin this process by describing the work I did with a group of children who led me to ask the question: "What is the framework that gives form and meaning to this curriculum?" Next, I required a means for answering the question. I needed a method for collecting data. What emerged was a relationship between the methodology and data and from these, a form, which I have named "chapters". However, to my dismay, this did not unfold in neatly pressed thirds. My methodology created and collected data simultaneously, my initial question was only clear when I had finished my last chapter, and the evolution of the chapters kept producing more data so that even as I write, another thread lights up and attracts my attention. I will begin with the events that lead me to write about them, and I will describe the methods I used to do this. I will end with an outline of the chapters and I will write about all these things at once because that is how this research evolved and in a way that is how ritual comes to be.

I have used metaphor throughout this work because I believe that it is the way we make good language—by representing things we know with appropriate and carefully selected images. It is the language best suited to this kind of research. Language resymbolizes ideas, dreams and meanings in ways that allow us to "see" the thing that is being described. Metaphor—like art, like poetry, like ritual—renders complex notions into familiar and profound images. As the tossing of the stone has helped me understand the difficulties I have had in defining ritual, it has also provided me with an image around which I can do my research. "Journey" is another metaphor I have appropriated to help me understand my own experience and that of the

students I have worked with. Its path disappears and reappears throughout this work, at times seemingly of its own accord . And it is "journey" which begins the first chapter. Jeanette Winterson (1989) writes that "Every journey conceals another journey within its lines: the path not taken and the forgotten angle" (p. 9). Every stone tossed or turned over revealed something that led me somewhere else and every arriving at a destination meant I had passed by other opportunities to learn more. There is room here only for the language of one journey but there are many other journeys located within its lines.

CHAPTER I

Writing Around the Edges of My Classroom

It is imperative that the researcher, when revealing the research, share the truth of her own journey. According to David Smith (1991) the quality of this kind of phenomenological and hermeneutic research depends upon this. I must include in this discussion a record of my own changes, the personal and theoretical transformations I experienced as I pursued this notion of ritual. Smith calls this exchange of truths between the reader and the researcher, "a showing of the dialogical journey" (p. 198). Yet, it is difficult to know just where to start the dialogue. Still, any good conversation, like this research, begins in the middle, at the heart of the thing. So too begins the journey.

I have many memories of rituals, meaningful experiences which have, as my research moved me to a deeper understanding, announced themselves in very specific ways. Although I feel I have always known about ritual, I could not articulate clearly what my practices were. Before this work I had no useful language for communicating the experiences. Over the years I think I have created ritual, practiced it, witnessed it without having ever read or written about it. I have never analyzed it, yet, intuitively, I have understood its significance for me and my students. I suppose I have described different rituals many many times because it is part of my narrative, my story, and to tell of myself inevitably led to telling about ritual. Ritual turned up in my work as a special education teacher. Yet I never called it by name. Not until I began to teach a group of seven intermediate aged children did I wonder about the origins of these partially formed ideas. What was the name of the structure I used to give shape and definition to my curriculum? I had no name, no theory, yet my students and I could feel the ripples. I needed to make language

in order to make meaning of these experiences. If I could understand this structure theoretically, I could speak about it in a pedagogical context and I wanted to speak about it so I could share my practice and inquire into the practice of others. I knew it impacted students' learning. I just wasn't sure how. I needed to write. I began to write to know what I thought. Writing became central to this inquiry. I came to agree with Laurel Richardson (1994) when she describes writing as a way of knowing—"a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 516).

I wrote first about my students. These were very creative, imaginative children who learned and socialized differently than most kids. Many things in their lives were difficult, challenging and painful and they needed to figure out ways to survive in a system that often recognizes diversity by noticing the ways we are all the same. These children did not feel the same as children in the regular program, nor were they. I could not reassure them of their sameness and after a few months with them, I did not want to. Their differences were surprising, interesting, confounding, joyful, frustrating and challenging. They knew much more about being different than I did and they shared with me how best to teach them. I believe it was their patience, good humour, insight and forgiveness, as well as that of my colleagues, that taught me to teach. It was with these children that I came to understand ritual in the context of the classroom and it was in leaving them that I began to understand the significance of some of the things we had experienced together. I realized that to talk about ritual I would have to tell some of their stories as I remember them now. Writing was my method of coming to know and narrative became part of how meaning was understood. I continued to write.

In the six and a half years I worked as a special education teacher I made many mistakes. I did get better and began to witness more children having

more successes; that is, feeling more confident, becoming better problem solvers, becoming more articulate. As a result, they revealed bits of wisdom that would occasionally make me smile but, more often, would astound me. Frequently, they identified and integrated the strategies they needed to cope both academically and socially in the regular programs. Many of them came to see their differences not as a deficit but as an asset. They were different yet connected. They did not always fit but now they didn't always care to. They found ways to contribute that were valued by mainstream children and many of them knew that they were going to be all right. This is not the case for all the children I taught. Yet, in my last four years, all the students were able to find ways of functioning in the world that, if nothing else, brought them some peace and, for several, brought them great success on their own terms.

When I left that position for an opportunity to work with student teachers, it was necessary to interpret and articulate what I believed about teaching and it was then that I began to wonder: Was there some kind of theoretical framework I used to build a classroom culture which allowed the students to change in the ways that they did?

Certainly we had many routines from which the students and I both seemed to benefit. These routines made life a little more predictable, dependable, and in some cases, they became sacred. Something was broken if we did not act out some parts of our day in certain ways. Indeed, changing a routine without some prior warning could result in feelings of panic and even betrayal. These became more than routines because they contributed to the way we oriented ourselves to the world around us.

We began every day the same way, in silence. It was a time to work independently. We ended our day with celebration and recognition of individual successes. Every week we had "Group," a skills and process

oriented hour set aside to talk, problem-solve, receive and react to new information. We discussed changes to the class brought about by the leaving of students, the arrival of new ones, holidays, and changes in staff. All these events and more became the center of our lives. They were the gaps and spaces in the day that allowed us to interpret ourselves in relation to new information. Whether it was events from our homes or events in our class community, we created space to make meaning. I was aware that these specific activities were more than routines because they became places where we went to, dwelling places which were significant. Instinctively I used the same focal objects to help orient us. These were things like a lectern, a cooking timer, a circle of pillows, the novel ready on the big oak chair. I used the same words, the same phrases to mark the beginning and ending of these times. I even left a record of these for the teacher-on-call knowing that a particular phrasing would call for a familiar response. Certain gestures were incorporated into these events and they became markers to indicate what to do next. Given the right combination of these things we could recreate the form anywhere. We could alter the location from the classroom to a campsite, and although students would have different experiences because the location had changed, the spirit of it remained the same. It was still an event that invited them to make meaning. These activities were always opportunities to interpret. Students were able to change their relationships with their environment because their relationships with themselves had changed. This was more than routine, more than a simple structure in a school day which organized the handing in of finished work or school announcements. This was ritual embedded in the curriculum and in this classroom. Even as this became something that I knew, I still could not easily articulate it. I only knew that it was a powerful and profound instrument of learning. And, when I tried to

define ritual, I found I still wanted to separate it, like a special assembly, from the everyday things that we did as a class, defining it outside of the ordinary. Certainly we had routines. This other thing, however, seemed to have a life of its own. It looked ordinary yet it felt like something more. Something meaningful. It was both. It was making from books and pencils, from pillows and chalk something extraordinary. We had, I think, begun to resymbolize the things we were learning about ourselves. We were taking the ordinary knowing of our daily lives and creating new language, new meaning by embedding rituals deep into our curriculum. This is what I needed to understand. I needed my writing to move more deeply into the meaning, into the knowledge held by these recollections of what we did. I needed stories.

Narrative: Methodology as Mediator

When I was well into my course work and still thinking and writing around the edges of these and other experiences, it was suggested I write about the school and non school rituals that I remember. I was encouraged to record them using strong verbs and strong nouns. I began with a story and soon found I was writing out. This kind of writing, like the circles made by the stone, is always occurring around the edges, writing the ripples moving out from the middle. The kind of writing I did at first seemed unorthodox but rather unremarkable. I found I was writing out and in at the same time. The waters became quite disturbed by the ever growing number of circles washing over circles. My stories became more specific, my language more precise. I felt I was writing closer to home. Madeleine Grumet (1991) helped me better understand and define this process. She writes,

> The task that lies before us is to provide a language that resymbolizes the knowledge that we have generated through the specific rituals of

> our domesticity so that it can inform the processes of curriculum development, negotiation, and teaching. (p. 87)

Grumet (1991) suggests that we use narrative as the means of situating ourselves in the middle of all we know. Whether we write about the final soccer game, the unexpected bus ride or the early morning garbage inspectors who make their living collecting cast off things, we are giving our stories as texts to be considered, talked about and retold by others. I needed to use narrative; my stories and others stories to resymbolize and name this experience I shared with my students.

Richardson (1994) would call this "experimental writing" (p. 520), a relatively new genre of qualitative research. She points out that it is difficult to specify the conventions of this writing because of its nature. Still, she recommends it as "a method of knowing" (p. 520). I think that conventions do emerge, however. They are defined by the relationships between the author, the subject and what it is she comes to know. My writing appeared as notes, academic analysis, recorded interviews and narrative. I collected them in what was called a "Commonplace Book," an interpretive location for coming to understand the topic I was writing about. It was a location for choosing language, bringing new ideas from other texts to previous understanding, reinterpreting this in light of experiences I had already written about. The Commonplace Book located my thinking, gave me a form to use in my data collecting, and provided a means of analysis. It is interesting to me that the practice itself, at least from a certain perspective, became a ritual. Amid all the writing I did it was the narratives that gave shape to all my previous writing. These pieces seemed to contain the strongest images, the best language.

My first real story was an attempt to understand ritual in a more conventional form. I chose a memory steeped in rhythm, darkness, candle

light and haunting music. I thought I had finally found the first thread, for it seemed to collect many luminous strands and refract the light into several different themes. As it turns out, it was only the middle. I am not at all sure the origins of my knowing of ritual but I began with a story that felt like home. Not the home of my family but of my extended family at a summer camp on one of the Gulf Islands. When I threw the first stone the circles it made in the water were my recollections of experiences from summers ago that seemed (at the time at least) to encompass all that I needed to know about ritual.

When I was eleven years old I went away to summer camp for ten days. There we lived, eight girls to a cabin, in small wooden huts with open windows and doors and slept on metal bunk beds. We had one counsellor who had the privilege of sleeping in a single bed. I remember a sense of belonging, quick intense friendships, daily events quickly recounted between activities, with much hilarity or reverence and challenges I could meet. And everywhere could be heard the sound of singing, sometimes powerful music, intimate and very beautiful.

At the end of every camp session we had "Indian Rock." It was the camp tradition to line up all the hut groups at dusk in front of the steps of Henage House. The staff would be waiting for us on the wide, elegant old front porch. They stood quietly until all were silent and still. Then the walk to Indian Rock was explained to us. Over the years the words didn't change much although the message was delivered by different directors. I was very lucky. My first was Skip and as I recall, she gave the ritual of leaving Henage House all the solemnity and ceremony it warranted. We were to walk in silence except for the singing of a hymn, and we were to follow each other in single file up the road, along a winding path to Indian Rock. Once there, we were to make a large circle and wait in silence. There was no repeating of

instructions, no test or threat if things were forgotten. It was assumed that we understood the importance of what we were about to enter into and in that knowledge we would intuitively know how to behave. I felt thrilled; I understood that this was sacred.

Our leaders led the first hut group past the big bay windows to the road. All I could hear was the crunching of dirt under sneakers as we waited for the line ahead of us to peel away and begin their trek up the hill. Then it was our turn. When I walked, I walked the same path, shared the same silence and sang the same songs as other girls who had been here before me and who would come after me. I walked in their echo. Skip, at the front of the line began to sing the old gospel song, "Jacob's Ladder" and we repeated three times:

We are
We are
Climbing
Climbing
Jacob's
Jacob's
Ladder
Ladder
(like an echo)

(and in unison we sang)

We are climbing Jacob's Ladder, soldiers of the cross

We finished singing the hymn before we reached the path. We left the road to follow the trail to *Indian Rock*. The sounds and smells changed from crunching and dust to the crackling of arbutus leaves and the dry smell of fir.

The rock was a huge clearing surrounded by and overlooking fir, arbutus and maple trees. Beyond the trees was the strait we crossed by small ferry to reach this place ten days before, and we were reminded of this by Skip. We were asked to recall the wonderful times we had had together, and to remember the new friends we had made. In remembering we collapsed time. This ten minute ceremony collected in that moment the friendships made, risks we took and the wonder we felt. She assured us that these memories would sustain us until we met again next summer. We were silent except for the occasional nervous giggle. Dusk disappeared into darkness. The words had been said like a benediction and we were then led down the other side of the rock,the beams from our flashlights, like little pillars, marking our path. Although we did not sing I heard it. I heard in my head the words of "Jacob's Ladder" sung by seventy girls.

The air was dry and warm. Pungent. We walked down toward the water, followed the path above the white shell beach, across the playing field and through the trees to the outdoor chapel. The chapel was a small clearing with several broad, rough benches, an altar made of some thick light coloured planks, and a small hut containing an old pump organ. The chaplain was waiting for us, dressed in his white surplus, bright coloured stole and his long black cassock touching the tops of his sneakers. He led us in the lighting of the tapers, little thin candles lit one at a time while prayers were said and we were encouraged to take the light that we had nurtured throughout the week and shed it upon those at home. By the time the words were finished we were one light, glowing softly in among the trees. Then the camp song was sung as we

filed out, accompanied by the rhythmic squeak and windy notes of the pump organ:

Take us on the Quest of Beauty Poet Seer of Galilee.
Making all our dreams creative through their Fellowship with Thee

We extinguished our candles and returned to our huts, up the dusty path in silence, flashlight beams crossing through the country darkness. Left with the mysteries of the night, the hymns still drifting about in our heads, our chests were tight with the sorrow we felt about leaving this very personal place. It couldn't have been like that for everyone. But it was like that for me.

•

This kind of writing became my research. I began to write regularly in my Commonplace Book, three or four times a week. I wrote in response to things I had read and I wrote narratives which often generated further response. This kind of writing helped me articulate something I had read about or illustrated a new idea which sent me searching for more information. It raised many questions and led me to read in disciplines I might not have previously considered. Deborah Anne Dooley (1995) points out that reading and writing are themselves a ritual act that help us discover new ways of using and hearing language. She suggests that this relationship we strike up with reading and writing

> involve[s] attention to the things words describe, to sound as it resonates with the "thinking of the body" about our experiences of connecting feeling to meaning. (p. 99)

Attending to language became part of my research. It was essential that I become mindful of it, understand its origins, follow its leads. Words like evocative, engagement, sacred, gesture and transformation began to appear

both in my writing and in my reading. I would follow these words to the library, into classrooms and on the electronic mail system. Flipping first to the index of word references, I read about them in books on philosophy, art and social work. I took notes on my computer as I talked to friends and colleagues on the phone. An article I read by Ursula Le Guin (1989), which I refer to in more detail in Chapter Seven, makes the distinction between "mother tongue" and "father tongue," which helped me understand the language of ritual. Language, I was to learn, contains our stories as students and teachers. It reflects outwardly those beliefs we hold close. Even the silences reveal important details. Attention to language allowed me to establish and stabalize a point of view.

When I began to read I turned first to the anthropologists. The repetition, the music and candlelight in my first narrative, felt ancient and mystical and I wanted to understand it. I read descriptions of rituals used to mark events in a year. I read ethnographic accounts of ceremonies and celebrations for harvesting and hunting, deaths and births. These were great sweeping acts and images—big, like my camp experience—yet much bigger than the domestic rituals Grumet referred to. I began to look for and understand the small rituals too. Those that mark our everyday and bring significance to particular moments. Very slowly and with guidance, a methodology was being created. I studied the big and little rituals which shape our lives. My research was qualitative because as Glesne and Peshkin (1992) describe, I have tried "to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect" (p. 1). I did this in two ways. The first was phenomenological, for I was recording what I saw in notes, narratives, interviews and essays. I was recording personal perspectives, capturing with words the essence of specific lived experiences. The second part of my methodology occurred almost

simultaneously because I needed to understand the meaning of the events in order to record the event accurately. Therefore, the work became hermeneutic too. I had to tell about the ritual by trying to understand its meaning and I had to tell about its meaning by trying to understand what it was made of. I had to interpret the sound that resonates from its center because this was the language that best describes it. And I had to find its center by writing and reading the stories that surround it. Always I wrote, read aloud what I wrote, listened to others writing and wrote again.

As Dooley (1993) points out, writing acts to mediate between the conscious and unconscious (p. 97) turning over stones and attending to all the activity beneath it and around it. Small personal rituals began to reveal themselves and I would write about them. Each stone tossed or turned over provided new ways of interpreting not just my activities but the those of my colleagues too. I noticed things I had never noticed before. Like the threads, particular ideas took on a luminous quality, and I began to see examples of one notion or another standing out from all the events in a day. Objects for instance. In my summer camp story I realized that the smell of dry arbutus leaves, thin, white waxed tapers and the old Anglican hymn books all became collecting places for my memories. These objects were integral parts of ritual and became the first of several themes I follow in this work.

This inquiry centered itself around stories. I have said that it is both phenomenological and hermeneutic in its character. It is hermeneutic because I am not simply retelling stories. David Smith (1991) asserts that:

> [H]ermeneutic consciousness is always and everywhere a historical consciousness, a way of thinking and acting that is acutely aware of the storied nature of human experience. We find ourselves, hermeneutically speaking, always in the middle of stories, and good

hermeneutic research shows an ability to read those stories from inside out and outside in. (p. 201)

I realized that I was revealing meaning in the stories and creating new meaning. It is this kind of writing from both inside and outside the circle that raised another question: What is the relationship between ritual and pedagogy? The unfolding of the next few chapters will answer this question.

The Chapters

The chapters appeared. They separated from the writing like collected pools of thought, with common themes. The evolution of these pools into chapters, one running into another, was influenced by particular pieces of writing, some of it my own and some written by others. For instance, my camp story helped me understand the essential elements of ritual: the rhythm, repetition, emotion, symbols, history and language. I wrote and read about each of these fragments, trying to understand the whole by looking at the parts, and, in the end, the parts by looking at the whole.

As I mentioned earlier, Le Guin's (1986) discussion of mother tongue helped me to define the sort of language best suited to this work. Mother tongue is not formal academic language. As Le Guin points out, "mother tongue is language not as mere communication but as relation, relationship. It connects. It goes two ways, many ways, an exchange, a network" (p. 149). This work needed to go two ways, networking with the reader in order for the concepts to be understood. This notion of reciprocity, became a kind of dialogue for me. I would read the words of others and respond in my own work. This relationship with the authors and their language was most profoundly felt by me in another piece of writing which is referred to throughout the thesis. These authors used the language of Mother Tongue.

I refer to the stories of Rochelle Yamagishi, Tweela Houtekamer, Evelyn Goodstriker and Cynthia Chambers (1995). These women are storytellers and teachers from four different cultures, who came together to write about their different lives. Initially, they met to prepare a conference paper on "Stories Our Lives Tell" (1992). Their writing, emerging from several years of meeting together, has influenced my work. Their writing is very individual, yet each is about relationships. And, although they are told as separate narratives, I can hear the echo of one's writing in another's piece. Their process of coming together to write, and the stories that were told, are in some inextricable way woven into the center of my own. Like the scraps of cloth used to make a quilt their narratives helped me construct the themes that were emerging in my own writing and around which chapters would be formed.

The threads that came loose as I wrote have given shape to this thesis. First I write about engagement. It seemed engagement must be first because I needed to understand how we become involved in ritual acts and how we engage children in our classrooms. What is it that makes us want to be caught up in the center of the event? Why is it that we never forget some things? This chapter attempts to answer these questions.

The next few chapters examines what I have come to understand as some of the necessary components of ritual. The Indian Rock ceremony was an event shaped around many things and leads me to ask: what constitutes a ritual? In Chapter Three I begin by isolating a part of ritual I call "sacred objects." These are the things that become imbued with significance. People interact in specific ways with objects and these actions bring order and meaning to our lives. Some of us cannot leave our homes without a

particular coffee mug, and a classroom of children could not begin their day without "Temperature Check."[1] Sacred Objects are an essential part of ritual.

Chapter Four discusses gestures. The walk up the gravel road to Indian Rock, the circle of girls standing in the shadows of dusk, the lighting of tapers are gestures which embody meaning. Gestures are the language of the body, and are used in ritual activities as a kind of shorthand for saying a great deal about the event by a stroke or a signal. Gestures and objects are relational and dialogical, that is, they are connected by the web of language particular to ritual.

Chapter Five discusses form and location. Rituals take on a specific form. These forms are defined by the set of relationships between the participants which give shape to the event, set boundaries and bring closure. The participants are people, objects and gestures. Location participates in this, for all ritual is located in space and in time. Location is an extraordinary notion for it can exist in a memory as well as a place and has the power to transform a moment from something plain to something complex.

The nature of transformation is the focus of Chapter Six. The experience of transformation is what distinguishes ritual from routine, the ordinary from the extraordinary. It shifts our perception of things into the realm of profound meaning. Transformation is generally invisible except, perhaps, in the bodies of those who are experiencing it. It is both cognitive and visceral, for it is felt deeply and understood fully at the same time. It occurs at the place where the object, gesture, form and location intersect and interact with the one who is participating. Here meaning is made and feelings are felt. It can occur in the

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[1] Annie O'Donahue and Sonia O'Connor team taught a multi-aged primary class in Vancouver, B.C. They described to me (March, 1996) the uproar from the children if Temperature Check, a morning circle activity which allow the children to establish their emotional and psychological state by giving their temperature on a one to ten scale followed by an explanation to the group of the events which had influenced their rating, was ever omitted from their day.

early morning, when the air is crisp, the sun warm, and the bouquet of daffodils on the long pine table have opened, reminding me of my mother. It can also occur in a classroom, at the close of the day, when the final song is sung and the parting words are said together, like a benediction. Chapter Seven, is located in just such a classroom. And it asks the question: "What is the experience of ritual as purposeful pedagogy?"

Chapter Seven uses as its form and location the work of an exceptional educator, Elly Tepper,[2] whose writing and teaching pointed me in the direction of this thesis. Her work as a classroom teacher confirmed for me that ritual is integral to those classrooms where children and teachers are deeply absorbed in learning. I believe that many teachers are currently engaged in this kind of pedagogy with their students. I suspect that those teachers, like me, may not have a language which allows them to articulate what they are doing. Without a language we cannot build the networks of words and images needed to deepen our understanding of our practice, articulate this practice to others, and extend and embrace the brightly coloured, intricate web of relations we have with students and colleagues interested in ritual as pedagogy. This thesis endeavours to announce this relationship by tossing a stone into a pool of water and describing how the light refracts off the circles in spectacular ways.

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[2] Elly Tepper was a practicing teacher in Hawaii when I met her four years ago. In Chapter Seven I describe this meeting, its impact on me as a teacher, and upon this work. I rely heavily on her practice and her article (1991), as a location for classroom practice.

CHAPTER II

Engagement

In the same way that we turn toward the sun, seek the source of a noise or pick up an infant whose arms are lifted toward us, we are drawn to ritual because it engages a place deep within us. We are engaged because we bring something of ourselves to the event. We are perceptually and intuitively involved. We know that by turning toward the sun we will receive its warmth; that we will make sense of the noise; and we will lift the child to us. We are fully in and connected to our world. Ritual creates the interpretive locations we need to make sense of our environment and our place in it. It allows us to dwell there; making sense, making meaning. Without it we are airborne, without ground, without focus.

Engagement is about how we perceive ourselves in our world—not apart, but embedded in it. As Berleant (1991) suggests:

> There is no way here in which one can stand apart. A physical interaction of body and setting, a psychological interconnection of consciousness and culture, a dynamic harmony of sensory awareness all make a person inseparable from his or her environmental situation. (p. 85)

Engagement takes us deeper into this interaction and allows us to dwell there. It is an act of empathy that invites us into the world more fully and then, as Berleant (1991) points out, provokes us into acting and thinking differently about the interaction—shifting our understanding and engaging our imagination. This perceptual unity of perceiver and the world is defined by a harmonious coming together of commitment, activity, and emotion, changing how we come to know the world and our place in it.

In order to understand engagement, Shelby Sheppard (1993), using an educational framework, considers the relationship between commitment and activity. First, she points outs that the meaning of engagement has been polarized by liberal and progressive teachers. Both factions claim that engagement is necessary to teaching while using the one word to define what might appear to be two different theoretical approaches.

The term engagement is both a noun and a verb. It is used to describe a serious commitment or an activity to busy oneself. When considering these meanings in the light of educational theory, Sheppard asserts that there are two views of educational engagement which are complimentary. "Substantive engagement" she explains, involves "worthwhile knowledge and understanding and an individual's active agency" (p. 21), whereas "transactive" or "pedagogical engagement" involves the engaging of student's interests using a variety of teaching strategies. Although the two perspectives are often presented as disparate, Sheppard argues that one theory is not complete or effective without the other. Educational engagement requires the learner to commit herself to a venture which will be transformative, altering her perceptions of the world and her relationship to it. Pedagogical engagement is the activity itself. It defines the transaction between the learner and her environment. Sheppard explains:

> [T]he traditions of human understanding are explored, considered and incorporated into the individual's cognitive perspective in the light of present experience, thus enabling the individual to achieve a quality of life unattainable in any other way. (p. 100)

Ritual is, in part, defined by both the commitment of substantive engagement and the active transformational quality of pedagogical engagement. It has the potential for transforming a child's way of

understanding the world and her relationship to it while exploring the traditions of human understanding. Ritual activity helps the learner consider and incorporate new insights into her cognitive perspective in the light of her present experience. Thus, a student engaged in ritual activities can experience a quality of life only attainable through the dynamic encounters of engagement.

My student, Tomàs[1], became engaged through literature, and remained so because of the classroom rituals which evolved around reading, and the system of beliefs which supported these rituals. Literature provided the opportunity for him to commit to the possibilities of having his perceptions altered and his understanding of the world transformed. It created a location to interact with the text, exploring his past experiences in the light of new information provided by the stories. It gave him permission to care deeply about the characters and to feel strongly about his own life. Tomàs brought his heart and soul to the experience of engaged learning. Understanding his story helps to construct a dwelling place for engagement as an integral part of ritual and ritual as a pedagogical notion.

Tomàs came to my special education class very upset. He had immigrated to Canada with his family only three years prior. Although his spoken English was very good, he had suffered a great deal of heartache learning it. At his previous school this bright, sensitive, proud little boy was ridiculed and humiliated. After two years trying to cope in an open-area classroom, the noise, distraction and his friendlessness all became overwhelming. He began to misbehave. He was labelled emotionally fragile

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[1] Throughout this work I make reference to Tomàs, a real student with a ficticious name. I had intended to use his real name, with permission, because I wished to acknowledge his courage, his wisdom and his influence on my teaching. At the last minute I realized that the story I tell here is my story, not Tomàs' and in all likelihood he would do it more justice. He would certainly tell it differently. And so I respectfully tell my story about him, with gratitude.

and assigned to my classroom to begin a new year with six other very unusual, interesting boys. At the end of the first week, Tomàs was extremely dissatisfied with me, his new teacher. I remember clearly his parting words. "This place is a living hell!" he shouted as he grabbed his books and stomped out of the classroom. And so began our year together. Certainly I was engaged by this intelligent and outspoken boy. However, I needed to find a way of engaging him.

Engagement is not defined by the activity but by the joining together of activity, commitment, and emotion with the participant. We are deeply engaged where the intersection of these occur. One child might find this in outdoor activities, for another it might be music. The activities only matter in so far as they bring an individual to this transformative intersection and then support his dynamic interaction with an appropriate structure. I was already seeking this kind of engagement for my students when I met Tomàs, and the rituals I established supported our experiences. A workshop I had dropped in on several years earlier laid the path for me.

While working as a Child Care Worker in a special education class I attended a conference for support people working in the school system. I heard Michael Burns (1982), a counsellor from Calgary, speak about his use of stories as parables to help children overcome emotional obstacles. First, he would interview the children brought to him. He asked about the difficulties that overwhelmed them, and as he talked and listened, he listed the virtues he felt the child would need in order to overcome whatever dilemma was presenting itself. In the intervening time before the next appointment he would write three or four simple stories about protagonists who used their virtues to triumph over their adversaries. Like Beach (1993) and Appleyard (1993), he believed that children can imagine themselves the central figure in

the story, experiencing the competence and independence felt by the hero and seeing themselves as having the initiative, courage, and wisdom necessary to bring order to a disorderly and problematic world. He always chose heroes that were a different age and gender from his client because he felt that projecting themselves onto someone just like themselves was self defeating. They already felt sure that they could not deal with the problem alone but becoming someone else offered new possibilities. At the next visit he would recount the stories he had written to the girl or boy. Every week he repeated this process. Sometimes he would again ask the child about the presenting problem and again he would list the virtues needed to deal with them. Often they had changed as the child began to understand their problem within the new context he was providing.

His work made sense to me. I felt that I could engage Tomàs the same way I had been engaged as a young and voracious reader. Of course I didn't know then, (or could not articulate it), that children my age frequently identified strongly with the heroes and heroines upon whose abilities and virtues I could model my own life. The characters in Thornton W. Burgess's books (1964) were almost as influential in shaping my values as my parents were. Burgess created a community of forest animals whose great integrity was tempered only by an interesting whisper of self-righteousness. Virtue played a central role in the lives of these creatures. Reddy and Granny Fox, two barely redeemable characters who appeared in all his books, were juxtaposed with the other animals by their lack of integrity. They were the agents for lessons in humility and retribution. The other creatures tolerated their mischievous behaviour, forgave them their trespasses, and frequently taught them about natural consequences. These animals were my heroes, and

Jimmy Skunk[2] was my personal mentor. This use of story to help children discover the heroes within themselves made sense to me. Like Salvio's (1995) description of her students, I too made emotional alliances with the characters I read about. I took up their commitments, shared their daily struggles and emotionally made myself available to them. I empathized completely, absolutely and passionately. I hoped my students would also embrace this relationship with literature.

Appleyard (1993) explains that the victories of the heroes and heroines of juvenile narratives, interpreted in a variety of novels would assure my students that the "adventure of travelling into the world and meeting its challenges can have a happy ending" (p. 63). A character like Karana, the aboriginal girl in *Island of the Blue Dolphin* (1960), can represent the possibilities of independence, effective decision making and survival for children, who, like Karana, are isolated and left to make a place for themselves alone. Literature had a restorative quality. It offered my students alternatives, guidance, empathy and direct instruction on a more integrated and intuitive level than I could have designed solely through a classroom program. The stories I read engaged us because we participated from both the perspective of the characters and the perspectives of our own lives.

For my students and me this became a kind of "reciprocal engagement." We perceived and acted from both inside the story (with the lives of the characters) and outside of the story (from our own narratives). The characters or objects in the stories were strong enough to influence our thinking and our behaviour. We were engaged because we allowed ourselves to be involved, to empathize with and to feel for the young heroes. We let

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[2] Jimmy Skunk appeared in most of the books, however, he had his own story, *The Adventures of Jimmy Skunk* (1964).

them advise us, caution us and challenge us. We commited ourselves to them. This is what Berleant (1991) calls "participatory engagement." He explains that art can, like the stories, become real and we are transformed from "imaginative participants" into "real agents." Indeed, art, music, literature—when our perceptions and emotions are engaged, all have the potential to transform us into active, committed agents in our own lives.

The stories I read with my students were well written. Often, a strong text forcefully imposed upon us a new perspective, causing us to feel deeply—experiencing the story actively, kinesthetically. Berleant (1993) describes it like this:

> As the painting is transformed from object into a region of active experience, our perception of environment turns us from imaginative participants into real agents whose salient sensory modality is kinesthetic. We become actors in the theatre of the landscape ... performers in the art of environment. (p. 76)

I wanted my students to participate in the stories, to commit themselves to the characters. I chose books I felt could be transformed into "region[s] of active experience" (Berleant,p. 76). Over a period of two years I read aloud *Island of the Blue Dolphin* (1960), *Hatchet* (1987), *The Root Cellar* (1981), *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* (1971), and *Castle in the Attic* (1985). Tomàs had joined us by the time I read *The Bridge to Teribithia* (1977), *The Seventh Princess* (1983), *Absolutely Invisible* (1988) and *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (1976). It was *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* that moved something in Tomàs; that engaged him.

After lunch the children were expected to come quietly into class and select a quiet reading book. At about 1:10 I would move my chair to the front of the class and get ready to read. Tomàs's desk was at the front of the room

and he would pull it up as close to me as he could. Most of the other boys drew while I read—but not Tomàs. He sat and carefully watched me. The other boys would occasionally ask a question, but Tomàs asked more than the rest of them together. He wanted to understand the jokes, the subtleties. He wanted events put in historical context and mostly he wanted to know why. Why were African Americans not allowed to own land? Why were they poor? Why were they afraid? Why did they act the way they did? Why do people taunt, humiliate and ridicule others? He wanted to look at oppression from every angle, from every perspective. He was the instigator of several debates. He wanted assurances that this did not happen anymore even when his personal history told him that it did. The other boys talked about their experiences and Tomàs was not always happy with what he heard. He became engaged with the characters. He was involved. Appleyard (1993) writes, "The more common expression of involvement is not explicitly a matter of emotion, but rather of identification with the characters and the situations they are in" (p. 102). For Tomàs it was both identification and emotion. He allowed, as Sheppard (1993) noted earlier, his "understanding of the world" and his "relationship to it," to be transformed. He explored his own experiences prior to coming to this class and "considered and incorporated" (p. 193) his new knowledge into his particular cognitive perspective.

He was nine years old then.

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Beach (1993) defines engaging as "becoming emotionally involved, empathizing or identifying with the text" (p. 52). Emotional response is central to the activity of engagement, to the processes of learning and, by extension, to the practice of ritual. Gary Philips (1992), author of *Classroom Rituals for At-Risk Learners*, writes:

> Emotion is the missing variable in most teaching. Students do not learn from emotional monotones. There is no cognitive memory (long-term) without sensory memory. You either control the emotion, or you do not control the message. ... The single most important variable in whether any student learns anything in any class with any instructional method consists of the related, remembered life experiences of the learner. (p. 3)

Robert Sylwester (1995) writes about the relationship between emotion and memory. He cites recent brain research to support his argument that schools need to construct curriculum which sustains the emotional well-being of students. When budgets are being cut, boards of education in turn, cut time spent on classroom activities "that tilt toward emotion" (p. 72) and are difficult to measure. Yet, as Sylwester points out, emotion is important to the process of education because it drives attention, which, in turn affects learning and memory. The system of the brain responsible for our emotions is powerful and sophisticated yet we don't know how to regulate emotion at school except to define it in terms of acceptable or unacceptable behaviours. I believe our carefully chronicled life experiences remain with us in such vivid detail, over numerous years, because of how emotions scribe them into our memories.

Tomàs brought his life experiences to the literature we read, and through his engagement with the lives of the characters, he began to make meaning of his own life. I think he came to appreciate the characters as mediators between his remembered, lived experience and new meaning he was developing and, therefore, the books and the location became "more than" separate events. Tomàs and the characters acted upon each other, a reciprocity which links the appreciator with the object through, what Berleant

(1991) calls, an "indivisible interplay of forces" (p. 45). He explains that this kind of

> Appreciative perception is not merely a psychological act or even an exclusively personal one. It rests on mutual engagement of person and object that is both active and receptive on every side. (p. 45)

The idea of mutual engagement does not just have to do with what we did with literature but how we did it and how it felt—collapsing the boundaries between Tomàs and the text and Tomàs and the experience.

At the end of our last term Tomàs moved out of the district. His parents wanted him in a regular classroom so we facilitated that. I believe it was a very challenging time for Tomàs and he phoned me about once a month that first year. We would have brief conversations. Sometimes he would just phone to ask how to spell something or to interpret an assignment. I have forgotten most of what we talked about but I will not forget his Christmas call. I had been away over the holidays and when I returned there were two messages from him. The messages were to the point. In the first he described a scene and asked me to guess what book he was reading. Clue number two was a quote from the book. He was reading *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*. I was astounded. When he began with us he was reading at a pre-primer level. Maintaining one language while learning a new one, compounded by some profound language delays, had made learning to read very challenging. Two days later he phoned me.

"Hello, Laurie, this is Tomàs."

"Hello Tomàs!"

"Did you get my clues?"

"I did. They were good clues."

"Did you guess which book I'm reading?"

"Yes, I did. You're reading *Roll of Thunder.*"

"How did you know?"

"Well, because you gave me good clues and because I am an extremely smart teacher."

"Very funny. I'm on chapter six. Do you know that when I read I can hear your voice and I can picture you reading. I can remember exactly how you were sitting and what your face looked like."

"That is a very difficult book for you to read, I'm really glad that you're enjoying it again. I know what you mean about remembering everything again when you read it."

I wanted to cry. I wanted to cry for his loneliness, his pleasure and his pain which I knew he felt because of the book he had chosen to revisit. I wanted to cry because of the joy I heard in his voice and the joy I felt. I wanted to cry because I missed him and I missed reading to him.

Paula Salvio (1995) affirms this kind of engagement in literature. She points out how objects, space, and emotion become a function of participatory engagement for her students.

> I believe these spaces reveal the emotional alliances they have to literature. These emotional alliances are indices to what they value as readers. As they revisit the spaces they once read in, where books, backpacks, and album covers lie scattered about, the students learn to see again the intentions of family, friends and teachers that influence their literacy, intentions that are fused with emotions that have social value." (p. 9)

We were engaged, my students and I. We began to understand literature as embodied. It was, as Sumara (1996a) suggests, not a "third-thing" that emerges from transactions between reader and texts, "but instead as a

material part of self as it is inextricably bound to a relational world" (p. 114). Students began to compare one character with another, one book with another. Reading became an intertextual experience: the texts of our lives interacting with the texts I was reading aloud. We lived in the characters. As Berleant describes it, the encounter is like the "sense in which the perceiver lives in the dancer's body, participating empathetically in the movements ... [indeed] a large part of the exhilaration of a dance performance comes from this active somatic involvement" (p. 170). Living the dance in the dancer's body is like inviting the lives of the characters into our personal stories. As readers we locate ourselves in a space which is, I believe, the synthesis of commitment, activity, emotion, and meaning.

This notion of space or location becomes the medium for uncovering meaning. For Tomàs, the space was our classroom and his participation in the story. Every time he returns to that book or a book that reminds him of that time, he relocates himself, slides into those spaces which allow him to make new meaning. Space is not outside of ourselves. Rather it encircles and embraces the person, defining them and including them as a participant. For Tomàs it was books. For Raymond, it was the soccer field and his art work. Like Tomàs, these places defined him, committed him, involved him. Both boys were engaged in learning about themselves.

I believe that we, as a community of readers in that classroom, borrowed from our characters, understood them in a different way; the way my students wanted to be understood. The work of Clifford and Friesen (1995) clarified our experience for me. In their article, they describe how the children in their classroom recognized, from the legends they were reading, the character of Coyote in their classmate, Manuel. And they recognized in the distinctly different behaviours of Manuel, a special needs student, some of the

qualities of Coyote, a "trickster" in First Nations legends. The children recontextualized Manuel. The stories they were reading and writing about Coyote shifted their understanding of Manuel and as Clifford and Friesen suggest, "The boundary between text and the world gave way" (p. 13). I think we became like those children who let the boundaries between themselves and the characters:

> flutter and shift, holes and spaces open. And through those holes would pour children like Manuel, now with proper names, with bodies and hearts and minds that we might know otherwise. (p. 15).

My students and I encouraged the characters in those books to act out our hopes and fears and then watched them from our chairs and desks to see if they survived. They poured into our holes and renamed our fears. If those characters could do it then we could. Tomàs could too. He could because we found a location for him to make meaning, a mediator for his commitment, activity and emotion. These were the locations for the construction of rituals—the silences, books, oak chairs and ceremony which supported and guided his journey.

Tomàs' engagement was most evident with books, but he was engaged by other things as well. In retrospect, I recognize the many special objects, meaningful gestures, and sacred ceremonies which defined our classroom. These provided a set of relationships which included each of us, engaged us, and helped us locate ourselves in meaningful ways.

Ritual apprehends and synthesizes these objects and gestures, these spaces and gaps, for this kind of reinventing, rewriting, reinterpreting to occur. Once engaged, we come to know the exhilaration, the sorrow, the prism effect of wisdom, insight and second sight. And, where the cognitive and spiritual growth, and emotional restoration of children are concerned,

ritual provides the underpinnings, the infrastructures, the luminous threads which bind the experiences to us.

Berleant (1993) recalls T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, where he writes: "You are the music while the music lasts." When we are engaged, Berleant points out, there is no difference between the composer and the listener. Once we are engaged we seem to be in a space without time and it is here that the practice of ritual occurs. This is not a vacuum. It is a location with an identifiable form, where objects are perceived as significant, and relational and gesture is used as language in order to transform the experience from the ordinary to something memorable, repeatable and made sacred. Tomàs used the book, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry*, as a sacred object, the text as parable. When he handled the book he was transformed, relocated to the place where he gained both a subjective and a cognitive understanding of his life's experiences. When he recalled the form: (the book, the desks being moved, the resonance of voice, the gestures used to both tell and receive the story) he also recalled the feelings, the insight, the aesthetic quality and the wisdom he acquired. Because of how he perceived the subject and its part in the ritual, he could return over and over revisiting, reinterpreting and recalling meaning for himself. Berleant (1991) writes that,

> Engagement is the signal feature of the world of action, of social exchange, of personal and emotional encounters, of play, of cultural movements like romanticism and, as is our claim here of the direct and powerful experiences that enclose us in situations involving art, nature or the human world in intimate and compelling ways." (p. 44)

Engagement brings us to ritual. Ritual constructs a framework for making meaning, involving us in intimate and compelling practices. Berleant states that "Engagement is bringing something into being" (p. 148).

And for the purpose of this discussion, it is the one feature which brings each of us into being mindful of the ordinary and exceptional rituals of our daily lives.

CHAPTER III

Sacred Objects

Central to human nature, and throughout history people, have cultivated relationships with things. They are more than the just the tools we use—artifacts of our evolution as a civilization. Nor are they just objects we acquire and use to bring order to our daily lives or keep as mementos; we are in fact, engaged with them in particular and significant kinships. How we perceive these objects determines how we interact with them. Langer (1942) writes that "The first idea of a god is not that of an anthropomorphic being that dwells in an object, e.g., in a certain tree; it is simply a notion of the object itself *as a personality* , as an agent participating in the ritual" (p. 163). The object or thing is not a dweller but a dwelling, not a person but a personality when in relationship with an individual or individuals and their environment. Objects are a statement about the human need to make symbols (p. 41) as a means of making sense. To understand ritual, then, we need to understand the essential nature of objects as relational entities, as symbolic markers, and as sacred agents in the ordering and understanding of our daily lives.

When I began to consider objects in this way, I remembered my first few months at my new school. I was drawn to Ailsa's classroom. I would stand for a moment just looking, before heading off to find my students. At first I thought I was attracted by the filtered light, altered in some seemingly inexplicable way by the brightly coloured silk parachute she has suspended from the ceiling[1] . Rather than block the natural light from the windows or

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[1] Ailsa Craig has taught both primary and intermediate classes, over a period of several years in Vancouver, B.C. Having found this parachute she has moved it from one school to another, and from one classroom to another. We discussed the meaning of the parachute, one evening (April, 1996) over the phone.

inhibit the hanging fluorescent bulbs, it had transformed it, changing the light in some way to create a warm glow in that part of the room. She has gathered the parachute to a point in the middle with the edges draped out like a marquee tent. The pitch of the cloth provides a kind of shelter for part of the classroom well above the heads of the students. The edges of the material are tipped slightly upward or in some places lie parallel to the floor creating an illusion of size and space. This sense of uncertainty as to where it begins or ends is hopeful rather than unsettling. There seems to be no boundaries. Even a visitor sitting at the edge of the canopy is included in the community. I have found its presence almost magical: the drape and fold of the silk, the refracted light, the implied metaphor of protection and safety all act upon the visitor, and I have felt pulled into its shelter.

"It is the meeting place," explains Ailsa. Here, under the parachute, students gather for class meetings, lessons, and large group discussions. Here problems are resolved, decisions are made, ideas debated and explored. It is a meeting place—not just for people, but for ideas and feelings too. It creates a space for debates, heart-felt discussions and the discovery of exhilarating new ideas. It locates Ailsa's pedagogical history and it is the place where her teaching continues to unfold through the interactions beneath it and because of it. It is both a metaphor and a model for her teaching. It is an agent for making meaning, collecting memories and maintaining relationships.

This notion that an object or thing is meaningful is the subject of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton's book, *The Meaning of Things* (1981). In placing their work within the context of an historical inquiry they note the early work of Georges Gusdorf (1948) who considered the idea that "to be is to have ... or that one knows who one is by the objects one owns and by how one uses them" (p. xii). Similar themes were explored by Gabriel Marcel (1935) in

his work, *Etre et avoir* and later, by Jean-Paul Sartre (1956). A decade later, George Perec (1965) in his novel, *Les choses,* used this idea to portray human life. The novel gave way to a short lived genre called "chosisme," a literary movement whose characters were understood mostly in terms of objects, their acquisition, use and demise. It was through this form that "the reader learned, exclusively from the things he owned and from what he did with them, what a hero valued, whom he loved, and what his thoughts and actions were." (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981. p. xi) . These early studies do not appear to have led to further discussion, likely because of their failure to recognize the relationship between the person and the object and the dynamic nature of that relationship with others and their environment. The parachute in Ailsa's classroom is more than a reflection of her, or of her students. It is an illustration, a symbolic representation of the transactions between people and the things they choose to reflect their human condition. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton point out, "past memories, present experiences, and future dreams of each person are inextricably linked to the objects that comprise his or her environment" (p. ix).

Had Ailsa left the parachute stored in a box in her classroom its meaning would certainly be different, likely diminished, as would Ailsa. For "as long as things mean only what they are 'supposed' to mean, a person cannot grow beyond the boundaries set by culture and socialization" (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981, p. 181) . In taking it from the box Ailsa touches the fine silk, smells the musty and familiar scent of it and appreciates the colour and fold of the fabric. Her recognition of its aesthetic qualities goes beyond a material appreciation to an understanding of its intrinsic value. This move from seeing the thing to attending to it, from

recognizing it to perceiving it, is a distinction John Dewey (1934) makes when he describes the importance of aesthetics in learning. To recognize something for only what it is limits thinking to a habitual kind of understanding. To have perception however, allows for new possibilities. And so, as Ailsa takes the parachute from the box she not only recognizes the parachute's intended usefulness as a means of giving freedom to an individual while keeping them safe, she is aware of its integrity—at once very strong and very delicate. She makes time to climb around on desks, stand on the top step of the ladder and reach up to hook the parachute to a single linen thread hanging from the ceiling. She intuitively knows that not only is this duality of strength and delicacy a quality to be contemplated and understood, it embraces a metaphor regarding teaching and learning—a metaphor that for Ailsa and her students, is filled with history and potential. She can only understand this by choosing this object. In giving it attention she has selected it and perceived it as significant to her. Meaning is realized where there is this transaction between the person and the thing. Transactions are what Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) call psychic activity (p. 175), the channelling of energy in the form of "integrated attention" so that the object being attended to returns meaningful and pleasurable insight and understanding. This interaction between Ailsa and the parachute has an outcome—that of experiencing ourselves in relation to a community of learners and beyond that to something greater.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton further explain that these "two dynamic centres, the personal and the social, are related to each other at many points; moreover, both are also related to a third center of purposes which we shall call the cosmic level" (p. 38). The cosmic level is far greater than each of us. It is the "phenomena that control the rhythm of life: the sun, the moon

the stars; water and fire; wind and earth" (p. 38). These objects are purposeful; they bring us into relationship with ourselves, others and in relationship with the universe. Eric Fromm (1955) suggests that the "basic passions of man are not rooted in his instinctive needs, but in the specific conditions of human existence, in the need to find a new relatedness to man and nature" (p. vii). Objects can be selected, arranged, moved, and modified to connect us in dynamic ways with ourselves, our community and the greater rhythms of life. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) call this connectedness "the cosmic self" (p. 192). This the part of ourselves which seeks to find harmony with the environment. The cosmic self is the "the manifestation of man's restlessness at his own limitations and his quest after the true order of things" (p. 192). The specific use of objects are part of our human development and act as a psychic link to the universe, bringing us into its order.

These objects, artifacts, or things are not extraordinary. They may be dramatic or mundane, large or small, concrete or invisible, present or absent. They are often part of our every day, indistinguishable from the ordinary until they are chosen with intention yet without self-consciousness, to become the gathering place for personal or public meaning. It is the thing, placed in a certain way, called to mind in a certain way, that draws attention and causes the unfolding of memory and meaning. This choosing of symbols is considered a basic human need and a primary activity. Richie, (1936) states that making symbols was an "essential act of thought" (cited in Langer, 1942. p. 41). However, Langer (1942) feels that this kind of symbolic representation was fundamental to thought itself. Langer more precisely states that "if the material of thought is symbolism, then the thinking organism must be forever furnishing symbolic versions of its experiences, in order to let

thinking proceed. As a matter of fact, it is not the essential act of thought that is symbolization, but an act *essential to thought* , and prior to it" (p. 41). Symbolism, using objects to call together meaning, is the act of reflection, synthesis, and understanding. Symbolic representation is essential to cognition, it is essential to ritual, and it has a significant role to play in classrooms.

It is interesting that Ailsa's parachute, the meeting place, is true to the ancient Greek meaning of *sym-ballein,* meaning to throw together or join. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) note that the term was used to describe the act of two friends, when, prior to parting would break a coin in half, each keeping a piece in the hopes of seeing each other again. The next meeting would bring the joining of the coins and confirming of the friendship. The two halves signified the idea of unity. The origin of symbol meant the coming together of people. It is important to note that the opposite of *sym-ballein* is *dia-ballein,* meaning to separate or throw apart and is the root word for diabolic, a word we use to describe evil. Symbolization allows us to think and to unify our thinking and prevents us from being separated from ourselves and each other.

Many classes in the school where I work have these objects—these symbols that contain knowledge or recollections. The objects frequently act to unify thoughts and people. In one classroom it is a harp, in another a large stuffed polar bear, and in another it is the particular arrangement of the couches and cushions or the presence of the piano. These are the sacred spaces and things that bring order to the lives of our students and as teachers we bring the essence of them with us into the classroom. They become the sacred objects around which children can organize their day. They are witnesses to the act of learning. Grumet (1991) writes that:

> [The] ordering of daily life requires the aesthetic processes of symbolization, reinterpretation, the incorporation of alien cultures, objects, meanings, the blending and crossing of boundaries, the choosing of sacred objects, sacred spaces, secret names and jokes and curses and songs. (p. 76)

These processes become part of our curriculum because they name the things we know. It is this aesthetic practice of reinterpretation and symbolization that moves an object from the ordinary to the sacred. And it is this quality of 'sacred' that changes the activity from ordinary to ritual.

Ailsa's parachute is not ordinary. It will not be used for a costume or a cover for the computers. It will not be taken down to play with or be altered in any way. The rocking chair will not be used in other classrooms for extra seats nor made into a fort during free time. The harp will forever mean a time to gather, to sing and be in each others company. It is, however, not the harp that is sacred; it is the sound of the harp and the way it resonates within each child. What becomes sacred is the harmony. It is the sound of the harp and the sound of the child as she responds to it. This is an important distinction when understanding the role that sacred objects play in the performing of rituals. It is not the parachute that is sacred; it is the meeting place—the meaning that lies within the weave of the fabric made manifest by the gathering of the students. Once perceived, the object creates sacred spaces and hallowed moments.

It is not enough to say that sacred means "consecrated to or belonging to a god ... regarded with the same respect and reverence accorded holy things ... hallowed ... venerated ... set apart and dedicated to" (Websters, 1974). The definition falls short of explaining how we will know sacred—how it feels or what it looks like. The sacred declares itself in different ways depending upon

circumstances. Sacred objects are often announced by chance, as they present themselves in relation to the events, the people and the memories at hand. They often belong to a larger community of experiences, of people, and of collective memory and wisdom. Sacred objects are integrated parts of a long, complex and elusive set of relationships which when trying to define it, defy ordinary language.

Cynthia Chambers (1994) explores this idea of objects as relational, as kin, as sacred. She writes:

> I am related to the stones that I pick and hold, one in each hand, the cool rocks pulled from that slow bend in the South Saskatchewan River running through the north end of the reserve. I wonder, where did this particular rock come from? I keep it on the dashboard of my car where it stores energy from the sun like a heavy solar panel and I reach out and rub my hands along its smooth limestone curves. I wonder who was its mother and at what tender age did it roll away from its father or he from it? For the Crees there is a legend about Grandfather Rock and there are certain sacred stones that have the power to reproduce. No wonder stones are animate objects in the Cree language. When I look at this stone I see the wonder of a life shaped by mountains of water, the rush of years long past, and the tears of relations never met. I rescued this stone from the pile of rocks destined to heat the sweat lodge where it may have cured someone from cancer. Now it sits on my dash and cures me of loneliness. I wonder where the stone will go when I am no longer here to feel its heat and whose will it be if it does not belong to me?
>
> I am related to stones I leave untouched because they hold the secrets of the world between each sandstone layer and within each

quartz vein. Stones are my sacred relations because without them there would be no foundation, no mystery, no memories, no love to roll along the river from the mountains to the sea. I am a friend of stones because they shine even when there is no moon to guide them, no stars to glitter and no clouds to darken my way. (in Yamagishi, Houtekamer, Goodstriker, Chambers, 1995. p. 96)

Although these stones probably seem ordinary to a visitor standing on the bank of South Saskatchewan River, they are sacred to Chambers. However, to understand the stones as sacred, they need to be understood in relationship to her, in the language she uses to express this and the feelings she knows when she is with them. She places them in relation to herself in particular ways. She uses images that are not ordinary, to speak of them. The stones are sacred because they have collected and reflect much of her lived experience—much of her history—and she tells it in the language of magic because she is writing about stones. The stones have been placed specifically in relationship to and with her. As she honours them, she is honoured by them. This relationship is not necessarily rational, but it is necessary. To make the kind of meaning she is needing to make, she has chosen the stones and they her, and her telling of it is enchanting and unusual.

The story is a little unpredictable and I am reminded of Sumara's (1996a) explanation of Weinsheimer's (1985) concept of "The Hap." Weinsheimer calls these particular times, when something new arises, something not planned for, "The Hap." It is a somewhat mysterious occasion that seems haphazard, happenstance, like Chambers picking up the stones intended for the sweat lodge, and finding new meaning for them on the dash board of her car. Sumara (1996a) suggests that The Hap, occurs "beyond what we predict; it is what exists beyond our willing and doing" (p. 176). He

explains that it is what remains after we have planned, organized and applied our methodology—leaving behind it the chaotic, the ambiguous, the surprise and the serendipitous. It is unanticipated and, I think, a little magical.

To understand this event that is happenstance, unanticipated, magical, is to understand the language of the stones. Words chosen for academic discussions and conference rooms are not quite adequate to describe it. Chambers writes, instead, about the impossible in conceivable images. "I am related to the stones" and the reader knows this is true. This new perception of the stones as her sacred relations allows her to connect with her history and the history of the stone simultaneously. "I wonder who was its mother?" she asks, and observes, "now it sits on my dash and cures me of loneliness." Because the stone is sacred she can speculate about its future and hers and their combined relatedness to the universe. "I wonder where the stone will go when I am no longer here and whose will it be if it does not belong to me." I find I wonder this too. Chambers knows that "without them there would be no foundation, no mystery no memories:" and I am sure of this because of her relationship to them. This is The Hap, where sacred objects can bring us beyond the stones in the river, into the company of surprising and serendipitous thinking.

Certainly there is magic in the encounter with the sacred stones and there is magic in the language used to talk about them. They are the sound without customary words—an expression without convention. This, too, is like ritual, which also requires this specific language to be understood. Langer (1942) explains that,

> [Magic] is part and parcel of that great phenomenon, ritual...Ritual is symbolic transformation of experiences that no other medium can adequately express. Because it springs from a primary human need, it is

> a spontaneous activity—that is to say, it arises without intention, without adaption to a conscious purpose; its growth is undesigned, its pattern purely natural, however intricate it may be. (p. 49)

Indeed, the language of magic allows us to describe the meaning of sacred things and it is a language well suited to ritual. Sharon Butala (1994), when trying to understand her profound experiences with Nature, writes that it is "the place where words stop" (p. 64). Certainly, common language is insufficient when we "come to describe the way in which we apprehend experience that is out of the realm of the ordinary" (p. 65). In rituals, we use sacred objects as a means of "apprehending experience." It is this particular moment "caught" in the object, regarded as separate and possessing qualities that are beyond language, that help to define sacred.

What is sacred is also evocative. Strong emotions are evoked by certain objects and specific events. When considering the place of celebration in the life of her classroom Carollyne Sinclaire (1994) recalls a book by Byrd Baylor entitled, *I'm In Charge of Celebrations* (Baylor, 1986). In it is a story about a girl, a desert-dweller, who decides to celebrate the small moments in her life by recording the events in a notebook. She records such commonplace occurrences as whirlwinds because they "make her heart pound." Small occurrences are recalled in minute detail because they evoke tremendous feelings. When I read about the desert girl, I was immediately reminded of a novel I read almost thirty years ago called, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* written by Betty Smith (1943). I clearly remembered the main character, Francie Nolan, because she also wanted to experience the joy of everyday things. She wanted to hold a moment to retrieve "fifty years from now." I remember the passage so clearly that I can almost smell the pages of the book and see the

plaid bedspread on the bed where I sat propped up, reading. Smith (1943) writes:

> She decided to fix this time in her life exactly the way it was this instant. Perhaps that way she could hold on to it as a living thing and not have it become something called a memory.
>
> She brought her eyes close to the surface of her desk and examined the patterned grain of the wood. She ran her fingers along the groove where her pencils rested, fixing the feel of the groove in her mind. Using a razor blade, she nicked the next dot on one of her pencils and unravelled the paper. She held the raveling in her palm, touched it with her forefinger, and noted its spiralling. She dropped it into the metal wastebasket counting the seconds it took to fall. She listened intently so as not to miss its almost noiseless thud as it hit the bottom. She pressed her finger tips to the damp headline, examined her inked finger tips, then made finger prints on a sheet of white paper.
>
> Not caring about the clients who might be mentioned on pages one and two, she detached the front sheet of the newspaper and folded the sheet into a careful oblong, watching the creases come under her thumb. She inserted it into one of the strong manila envelopes that the Bureau used to mail clippings in.
>
> Francie heard as if for the first time, the sound the desk drawer made when she opened it to get her purse. She noted the device of the purses catch—the sound of its click. She felt the leather, memorized its smell and studied the whorlings of the black moire-silk lining. She read the dates on the coins in her change purse. There was a new 1917 penny which she put in the envelope. She uncapped her lipstick and made a line with it under her finger prints. The clear red colour, the texture

and the scent of it pleased her. She examined in turn the powder of her compact, the ridges on her nail file, the way her comb was inflexible and the threads of her handkerchief. There was a worn clipping in the purse, a poem she had torn out of an Oklahoma newspaper. ..."

The tattered poem went into the envelope. In the mirror of her compact, she looked at the way her hair was braided—how the braids wound around her head. She noticed how her straight black eyelashes were uneven in length. Then her shoes were inspected. She ran her hand down her stockings and for the first time noticed that the silk felt rough instead of smooth. The fabric of her dress was made of tiny chords. She turned back the hem and noticed that the narrow lace edge of her slip was diamond-shaped in design.

"If I can fix every detail of this time in my mind, I can keep this moment always," she thought.

Using the razor blade, she clipped a lock of her hair, wrapped it in the square of paper on which were her finger prints and lipstick mark, folded it, placed it it in the envelope and sealed the envelope. On the outside she wrote:

Frances Nolan, age 15 years and 4 months. April 6, 1917.

She thought: "If I open this envelope fifty years from now, I will be again as I am now and there will be no being old for me. There's a long, long time yet before fifty years ... millions of hours of time. But one hour has gone already since I sat here ... one hour less to live ... one hour gone away from all the hours of my life. (pp. 369-370)

The lipstick, the paper, the texture of the silk stockings all became at once sacred objects and with their memory returns the feelings of angst and

isolation, melancholy and wistfulness. I was thirteen when I read it. I was deeply moved by this passage and still cannot read it aloud without the emotion in my voice choking off the words.

The objects she chose announced themselves in a context. They were part of a physical gesture used to mark the moment, and the strong feelings she felt, I felt too, connecting Francie's past with her present and future and mine with hers. Francie Nolan and I were like the stones. We were kin. She taught me this practice of using objects, real or remembered to mark events, recall memories and reinterpret my life in relation to my world. It is a practice I do so frequently, and it is situated so deeply within impressions left like shadows, by this passage from the book, that I have only come to understand it by doing this research. Francie Nolan is a source—part of my evolution as a practitioner of personal rituals. For over the years I have created rituals to fix the feel of the cold, damp, ocean wind on my face, or the baby I hold tucked against me like a large warm walnut, or the gentle rocking of my kayak in the early morning at the place where ocean joins the steep, grey rock face. These are solemn, solitary ceremonies I am engaged in when I do not want to forget. Like Francie, I try to take in all the details, the scent, the colour and feel of the thing. I want to recall not only how they looked and felt, but how I felt. I want to remember the feel of awe and wonder, melancholy or joy. When I recall this time, those objects are ordered in the same way and I have a memory of the scent, the colour and the feel of the thing. I have created a ritual using objects which are now sacred because of how they have announced themselves to me.

Objects, whether they be wind or song, stones or books are central to the uniquely human activity of making meaning. As ritual is being created certain objects become hallowed, they make themselves known. We give

them special attention, psychic energy which creates a relationship where personal stories and private meanings are collected and embraced. Both by choice and by chance these objects become symbols of expression, connecting individuals to community; and, like the stones, all sacred objects participate in sacred relations. This is the process of defining who we are and laying a path for where we might go. As Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) explain,

> Things can have meanings that may transform the very world in which we live. But things by themselves alone cannot help us; only in the way we relate to them is their symbolic energy released. ... The meaning that releases the symbolic power of things is created, first of all, by the act of perception. The primary skill one needs to unlock the magic of things is that of seeing them objectively and subjectively at the same time, thus joining the nature of the perceiving subject with the nature of the object. This act of bringing together two entities in a process that unites while preserving the distinctive characteristics of the elements is the basic symbolic act—sym-ballein, to "throw together." (p. 247).

Knowing what is sacred is more elusive. It is the cold, damp, ocean wind on "that particular day". It is the slash of red lipstick on a piece of paper. It is the parachute in Ailsa's classroom, not because all parachutes are sacred but because this particular one symbolizes "the meeting place". It is sacred because sometimes the sound from that place resonates with the sounds from the children and just happening to be there, like the desert girl, can "make your heart pound." It is the place where words stop but meaning carries on in sweeping, rolling waves of comprehension. It is knowing that you are related to the stones. It is knowing that if every teacher could break in half enough

coins so that each of her students could carry the other half out the door at the end of the day, in that one gesture she would have expressed both her hope that they would meet again and her belief in the value of their relationship. When an object can and does these things, it is sacred and becomes an integral part of ritual.

CHAPTER IV

Gestures

Our interest in physical movement comes from the recognition that our bodies as well as our minds "know" the world. Our attitudes, our gaits, our gestures, our guts are always engaged in silent discourse with the world that precedes and supports our linguistic and conceptual schemes. This perception, that gesture, are acts so fundamental to our daily living that they escape our notice and are excluded from the conceptual systems in which we represent the relationship of the world and ourselves—to ourselves. (Madeleine Grumet, 1978, p. 59)

When I think of gesture I see my father's hands. They are very long and graceful, very strong and sure. He thinks he is only explaining something to me, and sometimes he is, although he is also confirming something for himself. I know this because of how he is with his hands in relation to the things in front of him. We are at a table at the end of a meal and he is intent upon organizing the objects before him into a pattern that has relevance only for him. Each thing is carefully lifted and placed, lifted and placed again. A fork is now juxtaposed to the salt shaker and the napkin ring is moved away from what I think might be his central idea. At first he is tentative. As I watch I can know without listening (although I always listen) that he is becoming more certain of what he thinks. Spoon and knife are neatly parallel. Like a dance, what appears spontaneous is actually anticipated, each object moved purposefully as his line of thinking unfolds. When he is finished he tucks his neatly folded and carefully rolled napkin back into the napkin ring for the last time and then looks a little self-consciously at the patterns he has made. He dismisses his efforts with a joke and a smile. I understand now that the gestures are a very fine and familiar performance, a rather beautifully

choreographed dance, which is reinterpreted each time so that even though the theme is familiar there is new understanding. I know that he cannot have these thoughts without these gestures, and over the years I have not only come to expect my father to make meaning by touching the familiar items with his hands, I doubt without these actions I would be as engaged. These compelling set of gestures are one of the ways I know my father.

Gestures are the pre-verbal link between the object and understanding. They are a movement, or collection of movements which express ideas and emotions. It is meaningful movement; it is "the language of the body" and is the means we have for expressing what we are coming to understand just before we are able to say it. Gestures reveal what we know because in the doing of something we know it to be true. The link between sacred objects and gestures is a delicate one. One is often a catalyst for the other, and the two, in relation to each other, retrieve old knowing and reveal new understandings. They are probably best understood from three interrelated perspectives. First, as a physical act which releases and relinquishes knowledge. Secondly, as a function of the "hermeneutic circle" which allows us new insight in relation to what we already know and finally, as a compelling pre-verbal language for unlocking, unearthing, and understanding those things that have profound meaning in our lives. This third dimension links Grumet's (1978) idea that gestures are the silent discourse "which precedes and supports our linguistic and conceptual schemes" (p. 59), to the first, that our bodies remember even the things we cannot express.

The work of Alexander Lowen (1975) commonly known as Bioenergetics, contends that we cannot make meaning without moving our bodies. In fact, it is generally agreed that our muscles hold our entire emotional history, because every feeling and every experience is encoded in

our tissue. Mary Wilkie,[1] a bioenergetic therapist, refers to the recent work of Lisbeth Marcher whose research in "Bodynamic Analysis" supports and elaborates Lowen's. Marcher believes that every muscle of our body comes under conscious control from birth. As an infant discovers and works the complex set of muscles used for reaching, she is also internally developing an awareness of what reaching does for her. She learns that reaching results in comfort, food or the withdrawal of any of these things. She learns to physically make the movement and, at the same time, she learns the emotional and psychological possibilities brought about by the actions. She learns that she can or cannot reach out in life and what she can expect if she does. Her psychological reality is also a physical reality. What hurts us physically also hurts us emotionally (and what hurts us emotionally can be experienced physically) and this knowledge is encoded in the muscles of our bodies. It is written in our movements or lack of them. It would follow then that some movement is inhibited by the memories contained in the muscles used to make the action (Wilkie, 1996).

Wilkie points out that the early experiences of children often occur in a pre-verbal period. Until there is language, memories are marked in our bodies and we have few ways of bringing events and feelings into adult consciousness in order to heal old hurts. It seems likely that gesture, in the form of ritual, is one way to safely explore, recall and reinterpret these unexpressed, carefully stored remembrances. Ritual activity provides a canvas for the artist's tentative search for half formed memories—gestures are the connective strokes of the brush. This kind of remembering will help to make

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[1] Mary Wilkie is a practicing bioenergetic counsellor in Victoria, B.C. We discussed the above ideas during three telephone conversations in May and June, 1996. She had recently attended a workshop in Vancouver where the work of Lisbeth Marcher, a researcher in Denmark, was presented.

new sense of the part of the poem, the painting, the song we already know. Sumara (1996a) writes, that "like the poet, the painter, the musician, the 'body-reader,' the researcher of lived experience must live a life that allows the possibility for interpreting the usually invisible and unarticulated relations among things" (p. 10). Gestures can help us to know, before we articulate it, what the finished poem or picture might mean.

It was pointed out to me that we may not all be kinesthetically oriented. Gesture may not be part of everyone's ways of knowing. Yet, when we watch infants explore their world it seems that at one time body language was all there was to communicate and receive information. And most of us did it well. Unfortunately, about the time children reach school age, they are being taught to disregard the language of the body for the more formal, less intuitive language of technicians and politicians, scientists and academics. Children at school begin to experience what bell hooks (1994) calls "the erasure of the body" (p. 139). Rather than learn a second language, a new language is substituted for the old one. hooks points out that as educators, "We are invited to teach information as though it does not emerge from the body" (p. 139). We teach orally, lecturing, instructing, asking questions, waiting for clearly articulated answers. We do not easily use what Salvio (1996) calls the "... new pedagogical strategies that are performative" (p. 4), grounded in the knowledge of the body. These performative strategies, activities that are artistic, active and reflective are rooted in the traditions of the fine arts. They allow children to understand the text by physically being in it. These activities are familiar to young children still playing out imaginary scenes in their back yards and alleys after school. It is more likely that we, their teachers, are no longer able to easily comprehend and communicate in a language that is non-verbal. What we learned as infants and how we have

been taught as children and adults have all but erased our ability to speak and teach in a language we can barely remember. For most teachers, however, fragments of the language remain. And, when there is time in the day, often with the door closed, we speak it with our children—in songs and stories.

Our ability to be kenesthetic learners is clear. For as Merleau-Ponty (1962) points out, we learn very well the language of the body when left to our own curriculum:

> When I move about my house, I know without thinking about it that walking towards the bathroom means passing near the bedroom, that looking at the window means having the fireplace on my left, and in this small world each gesture, each perception is immediately located in relation to a great number of possible co-ordinates. My flat is, for me, not a set of closely associated images. It remains a familiar domain around about me only as long as I still have "in my hands" or "in my legs" the main distances or directions involved, and as long as from my body intentional threads run out toward it. (p. 120)

I think that we also locate knowledge in the gestures of others. That is, when I imagine my father's way with the table things, I am connected to him. Or if I find myself doing the same movements, I have made a memory link that is as powerful as his own. His gestures become my symbols for understanding certain things and certain things about him. Is this why religious gestures are imitated so exactly by each priest in order that the practitioner of the rites be also the receiver of the religious memory and sacred insight that belonged to others and belongs now to all those practicing the same gestures? I think so. And each novice practitioner brings their interpretations to a new understanding of the ancient meanings, gathered up and released in each precise movement, each gesture.

When reading Alan Say's (1993) children's book *Grandfather's Journey*, I think of my own father's history and that of his father. I think of asking him about his family's stories of coming to North America and then I imagine him telling me, moving the water glass, lining up the coffee cup with the spoon. In remembering my father, I recall his gestures. This takes me deeper into what I need to think about. In this instance, I wonder if this habit has been passed on and I am confounded by the sensation of physical and psychic connectedness to "my" family in an old farm house on the prairies, "my" people in a stone house in Yorkshire, England, and to the women in my sister's dream, in Denmark, washing their clothes on the rocks, speaking a language once "mine." I have recalled his gestures for my own uses. In this case I have recalled the gestures as part of how I remember my father now that I have read the book. When reading the same book again aloud to my students, I listen to the stories my children tell of their grandfather's and fathers; stories of Vietnam, refugee camps and coming to Canada. I sit after they have gone and find myself arranging the pencil, pen and box of stickers and I am recalling my father. I wonder what he would think of the stories of these children, and then I wonder what he would think of me, their teacher. In both cases, the gesture of moving and arranging objects has brought me in touch with him. In the first instance, I did not need to touch the objects with my hands, only with my thoughts by recalling them as symbols of recollection, and in the second case, it was the moving of the things on my desk that brought me to fix the consideration of my father with what I am learning about the children I teach, and then to project my father and the children somewhere into my future. I do not need to have the dinner things there to remember him. I need only recall him doing it. Or do it myself. Regardless of how I remember, I am there with him or he is with me and the

moment is transformed from fiddling with the things on my desk to something evocative and profound. The thoughts are unformed; they are felt. They are not yet the language of conscious thought yet they are language. Grumet (1978) explains this idea that gestures express thoughts and feelings not yet formed. She writes that:

> [Merleau-Ponty] contends that the body is the mediator of the world, incorporating objects and external space into an inner core of meaning that is not constituted in conscious thought but lived. This domain of lived, non-verbalized thought must not be mistaken for the unconscious but had better be understood as, perhaps, the preconscious, where experience that has not yet risen to expression but is nevertheless accessible to reflection resides. (p. 59)

This idea of the body as "the mediator of the world" helps me understand my colleague's observations of her students. Linda[2] (1996) wrote to me recently about what has become a daily occurrence in her classroom. "What is the difference between ritual and routine?" she asked. She then described a routine she had begun at the beginning of the year with her Kindergarten children as a way of quickly doing attendance. Each child was given a magnetic name tag which they stick on the blackboard when they come in each morning. This way everyone knows at a glance who is absent. She wrote,

> This is something that we 'just do'—but there has almost become a sense of ceremony, and some sort of significance attributed to the name

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[2] Linda Laidlaw, is a colleague and graduate student who is writing her thesis on children's writing. She teaches in a different district, so we have been corresponding by electronic mail. We write mostly about the process of writing, the methodology and data collecting best suited to this work, and about our students. I have included here, with her permission, an excerpt from a letter to me. I have referenced it in the bibliography because this student has become a significant part of Linda's thesis in progress.

tags. For example, near the end of the day a child or two take them down from the board and they arrange them in a precise way on my metal trunk (lined up in columns). This isn't something I've instructed them to do. It's become somehow about making some kind of 'order'. (Laidlaw, 1996)

The children are the mediators between the randomness of classroom learning, the concreteness of name tags and the meaning they credit them with. Creating order with sacred objects is one of the ways that we use ritual. The anthropologists, Moore and Myerhoff (1977) write that:

> Ritual must be orderly because it frequently interrupts or manages or accompanies various forms of disorder, ranging from the ordinary rough and tumble confusion of everyday life, through the disorder of choice, and the multiplicity of inconsistencies in ideologies and in social arrangements. (p. 17)

Linda's Kindergarten students were expressing their lived language. They were making sense out of their relationships, new knowledge and new understanding of things they already know. This rough and tumble confusion of daily life required the children to bring things into alignment in order to unlock meaningful thought. The moving of the name tags was a way of incorporating objects and external space into their gestural life and internal space, where meaning is made. They were orienting themselves in the midst of undiscovered meaning. It is interesting that they begin the day by connecting with themselves (kind of like looking your name up in the phone book ... "yes I am really here because it says so"), and again at the end of the day. Their day ends with a signature, a signing off. With each gesture, the children say, "This name tag belongs here, I belong here, in this classroom, right in front of Taylor and beside Veena! Here I am." It is a celebration.

Grumet (1991) suggests that it is hard to recover these ordinary rituals because they are often the backdrop to the interruptions of classroom life. She writes:

> it is not only disorder that illuminates the dear order of the everyday. There are its ceremonies: the ritual embedded right in the center of daily life that says, "This relation, this way of doing things, this object matters." (p. 74)

The gestures, caught in everyday rituals, are simple expressions of complex meanings.

This notion of gesture is an integral part of a contemporary understanding of interpretation, what Gadamer (1990) calls the hermeneutic circle. Sumara (1996b) interprets this idea by suggesting that, "simply put, the hermeneutic circle points to the fact that in order to generate new knowledge and understanding, we require old knowledge and understanding" (p. 5). New knowledge, as soon as it is understood, affects how we understand old knowledge, past experiences are seen again—reinterpreted and re-collected in a new order or pattern. Knowledge, then, can be in a continual process of reproducing and gestures act as a point of entry into this reproductive cycle. Gestures, often in the company of sacred objects, recall old knowledge—old memories first, and new information is then reflected upon and assimilated. When we look at new knowledge in the light of old we might say, "This reminds me of ... ." Then, to understand hermeneutically, we make the gesture, put in place the sacred object and then recall. Having done this we might say, "When I remember this, I can understand this new idea." New knowledge is forever altered because of memories we have already collected.

Linda's students embodied the concept of the hermeneutic circle. When writing back to Linda, I asked her what had happened to Anna's name

tag, a little girl in her class who had died suddenly two weeks prior. Linda replied:

> We had Anna's name tag in among all the other ones for most of last week. Interestingly, it seemed that for some of them the left over name tag helped them conceptualize what had happened—many of them kept touching it, going back to it (as well as a number of objects around the room that belonged to her). Someone said, "You know, Anna is going to be 'away' forever now." A number of the kids kept talking about that. The kids and I made a 'memory box'—they decided to put it in a special, secret (and rather hidden) spot in the room. Inside the box they've put their own drawings and memories—we put a name tag she'd drawn for her cubby on the outside of the box, as well as their own decorations. They all chose to draw and cut out hearts to put on it—nothing else. Interesting that they'd all choose something that is, essentially, a symbol rather than drawing pictures of Anna or something else. I asked them what we should do with the magnetic name tag and they thought it would be a good idea to keep it in Anna's memory box—you're right, it has now become a sacred object (even more so than all their own name tags), as has the box. I had a conversation with the teacher-on-call who said that they told her the story of the box and that they took it out and added more. So it's interesting for me to know that this continues without my presence ... I tend to use objects and space in a somewhat symbolic manner—much of that comes from my drama knowledge—use of symbol as a "less is more" perspective. I think also that when children are five and six they have a strong need to create symbols, order, and routines—they'll create

their own quite easily if they're given the opportunity. In fact, in thinking about it, I have many other examples. (Laidlaw. 1996)

These students participated in the hermeneutic circle of understanding. Given the knowledge of Anna's death they constructed symbols, objects and gestures to hold the memories of her. However, given the meaning contained in the name magnets they could articulate what they understood about her death ("You know, Anna is going to be away forever now.") and having reinterpreted their new knowledge in the light of the ritual, they could now put her name tag in the memory box.

Gesture is both introspective in nature, like the students thoughtful ordering of the name tags at days end, and expressive, like the movement of Anna's tag from the 'away' place to the memory box. As an expression it is symbolic movement, a metaphor which is understood objectively and subjectively simultaneously. We understand that moving the name tag is simply that—a movement—an effort to tidy up or organize thinking. Yet we also know that in this context it is what Langer (1943) calls "the symbolic transformation of experiences," (p. 44) from a name tag to mark non-attendance in class to a symbol which marks nonattendance in life. Langer (1953) describes it this way:

> Gesture is vital movement; to the one who performs it it is known very precisely as a kinetic experience, i.e. as action, and somewhat more vaguely by sight as an effect. To others it appears as a visible motion, but not a motion of things, sliding or waving or rolling around—it is seen and understood as vital movement. So it is always at once subjective and objective, personal and public, willed (or evoked) and perceived. (p. 174)

It is extraordinary that gesture can embody and mediate this relationship between objective and subjective, reflection and expression. As a teacher educator, Paula Salvio (1996) chose gesture as a mediator for transforming, symbolically, the students experience of a novel. Salvio formalizes gesture to talk about experiences that were "beyond language" (p. 8). She engaged several theatrical conventions; Montage, Context Building and Reflective Action, taken from the theatre of Bertolt Brecht (1957, 1972) and Jonathan Neelands (1990), to help her teacher-students explore Edwidge Danticat's (1991) book, *Krick? Krack! . Krick? Krack!* is a collection of short stories—powerful and compelling accounts of Haitian life during the terrorism of the Tonton Macoutes. Danticat writes narratives, one story linked to the next, paralleling the connectedness of the characters—terror and despair, fear and determination pressed into the pages like scars on flesh. Salvio felt that the text demanded more than conventional ways of understanding. She felt that her students needed to "... physically dwell within the world of *Krick? Krack!*" (p. 8).

Salvio uses Sidonie Smith's (1994) term "identities body" as a place of departure to develop a framework for learning using a form she refers to as, "embodied action." She was looking for ways her students could interpret the text by using their bodies to identify points of contact—sharing the strong emotions of the characters—unlocking and remembering their body's collected emotions. Salvio's students began to explore the text through the significant objects in the stories; a baby's bib, a scrap of quilt or a legal passport. Salvio asked them to track the objects by considering whose hands had touched them and what did each reflect about the owner? What was the symbolic meaning embodied in the thing? As they unearthed the meaning contained in the story's artifacts they began to "bear witness to" the

experiences of the fictional characters. Salvio (1996) writes that "Together, we began to learn that to bear witness to another's suffering is to lose speech in order to gain insight. In the context of testimony, the power of insight can only be afforded to us through our immediate physical involvement" (p. 10). The students then searched to find a physical form which would reflect what they had felt in their tissue about the experiences of the women characters. This is what ritual does.

The kind of embodied action described in Salvio's work captures the quality of gesture in ritual. For ritual, like theatre, is, as Salvio suggests, "contingent upon the gestural life of the body" (p. 5). Gesture become the gathering place and interpretive language for ordering, integrating and understanding meaning. Gesture is profoundly engaging because it is the source and access to first memories and all memories. Salvio notes that hooks (1994) refers to this kind of learning as "engaged pedagogy," and like ritual, it is an activity which creates "participatory spaces for the interpreting and sharing of knowledge" (p. 5).

As her students neared completion of their project the objects gained new significance:

> The objects they chose for this eulogy tied them to the women of Port au Prince, linking and looping their lives together so that they, as readers, could establish relationships with a social world that extended beyond their own. (Salvio, 1996. p. 16)

Salvio writes that each object—the bib of the dead baby, the passport, the bit of quilt, were chosen for its "dialogic capabilities" (p. 16). The students discovered the geography of the "narrative landscapes" (p. 16), and uncovered emotions that "although unspeakable, are not inapprehensible" (p. 16) because of the dialogue that unfolded between the students and the Haitian

women. The objects in the story—like the sacred objects we choose for the rituals of our day to day lives—not only mediated this dialogue but located the social, folk and religious narratives that shaped the social life of Haiti.

Gestures are not as specific as objects because the language inherent in them is qualitatively different. The gestures the students chose were less defined. The movements they made were both subjective and objective. First, having perceived gesture as symbol, as metaphor ("Who has held these objects?") they were free to participate in the final event in whatever manner best spoke to what they had come to know about the characters in the book. Gesture freed them from the role of being simply "bystanders." They were free to participate in the event.

> To be a bystander implies a detached, disinterested attitude; an attitude that feels no moral obligation to report to others what one has seen. To bear witness, however, is to actively perceive what has happened to other's in ones own body, with the sight (insight) usually afforded only by one's own immediate physical involvement. (Salvio, 1996. p. 20)

Without ritual we are bystanders in our understanding, in our own coming to know. Without objects we cannot begin the dialogue; that transformative language of symbols which gathers together what we are attempting to understand or confirm. Without gesture we cannot easily bear witness to ourselves and our environment for gesture is not only the embodiment of our memories, it is how we remember them—gestures allow us access to our perceptions, interpretations and projections into our futures. In ritual, gestures are the silent discourse, our expression of what we are coming to know.

CHAPTER V

Form and Location

Rituals are expressed in a form—a connective web of relationships between people and people and objects—relationships which are determined by a location. The location is a significant space for gathering together and interpreting the meaning brought forth by the particular pattern these relationships form. Form and location are themselves a relationship because one helps to conceptualize the other. Every ritual has a form which lays a path, constructs a system of relationships, and either reveals new understanding or confirms those things in our world that need confirmation. Every ritual has a location which establishes a context and completes the form. Location is the backdrop, the ground, the sacred place. It participates by completing the picture, and having done this, it transforms an ordinary activity into a sacred event. In the end form and location come together in an image. What is beyond the image is the subject of the next chapter, but how that image is constructed is the subject of this one.

Form is more than a linear linking of relationships. It is dynamic. Each relationship resonates with another, each tells a story, a history, a culture producing a concordant mythology rich in wisdom and insight. Location provides the hospitable ground, a fertile place for the ritual unfolding of meaning. This chapter is dependent on Le Guin's (1989) conception of "mother tongue," because form and location are best understood in the symbolic language of myths and metaphor, stories and song.

Three stories will illustrate form. I chose the first because it revealed to me how objects and gestures create the form, which becomes an instrument for understanding. The second story is about Russell. He helped me recognise

how form creates the gaps and spaces for seeking truths and lessons; what is referred to here as our personal mythology. The last story is recent. It has become an interpretive location for understanding how form creates a euphonious gathering of people and myth, transforming an activity from a singing lesson to a complex piece of harmonies, riffs and improvisations. Throughout, location weaves in and out of these stories like a strong melody. Later in the chapter, three more stories will pick up this melody to explore further, the concept of location.

Relationships

After I first read "Mitakuye Oyasin: Stories of Sacred Relations" (1995), written by the four women writers from Alberta, I needed to write. The women wrote about relationships, mostly between mothers and their children. When I had read the collection of narratives I wanted to think around the edges of the stories. I wandered about my room, stopped at the dresser and touched the picture of my mother, her mirror and brush and then sat down to write:

> *I want to touch the picture of my mother laughing and pick up the silver backed brush and mirror. I am aligning myself. What is this kind of orderliness? I think these are gestures. They are like the kissing of the clerical stole, the genuflect, and crossing of oneself. They are the movements that once acted out, are like the spoken word, a promise of things to come. What will come I wonder?*
>
> *I touch the picture of my mother laughing and I put right the brush and mirror. I begin to recollect something about her. There are important words said. Tonight they are the words of the four Alberta women who have been writing "Stories of Sacred Relations." Their text*

has become the rubric for my ceremony. Their words, so carefully chosen have transformed a memory into a ritual, a complete retelling, restructuring, recalling of something important. I do not want to recreate my mother, I want to understand something of her in relation to the words of the women. What is it that I want to understand?

I touch the picture of my mother laughing and I put right the brush and mirror. And when I do this I am taken to the part of me that has stored part of her and I am touching it however tentatively. I am unfolding it. The memory is like a softly yellowed linen cloth; an old napkin from the linen closet of my childhood. It has weight. It is something I hold it to my face to get the feel of it again. I unfold it. It does not contain things. It is the thing itself. It is the memory. And I feel. How do I feel?

I understand this idea that ritual is transformation. The gestures help me move from cold plastic picture frame and tarnished silver mirror and brush to another place. The place is right; the picture is the best likeness, the brush and mirror are worn and smooth. The words of the women, my mother's picture and the silver brush and mirror become this linen cloth which I weigh and touch between my thumb and fingers. I smell it. It is never quite the same as the time before. I feel sad tonight—melancholy . Tonight the liturgy of the women has transformed my dresser top into an altar. Here I enter into a new covenant with my mother. I have new understanding. I also have new questions. I am wanting to know about my mother's mothering, about her feelings towards her daughters and about the daughters I do not have. These are the thoughts I place upon the yellowed linen cloth. I understand I am in ritual, I am part of it. I am the gesture, the symbols,

the metaphors and the rubrics and it is these come together that make the whole sacred. It is the relationship among them.

I touch the picture of my mother laughing and I put right the brush and mirror. I feel. The words of the women mingling with the gestures and the symbols is an evocative happening. It helps me feel more deeply and I need to feel deeply in order to understand something. I want to understand the idea of sacred relationships between women, between mothers and daughters and I want to know if my mother felt that deeply about me, and if she did why do I not know about it. And I need to know if I would feel that way if I were a mother with a daughter. Would I feel the way these women feel? So I touch the picture of my mother laughing and I put right the brush and mirror because I want to know something deeply. This is ritual.

When I had finished I recognized a distinctive form, built around the relationships of me with the picture and brush, the brush and mirror and with the women from Alberta and my mother. I used the objects, and my perception of them, to explore deeply the questions that arose when I touched each thing that gave life to the form. I was left with a layered, thin-skinned, impression of my mother, of those women, and me. I have an understanding that is just beyond words, yet profoundly embodied by the ritualized gestures and the sacred objects. It is located deep in the form. This form took me into my own biography and spun a narrative, a story which reveals a little wisdom, a little insight into my questions. I could not have anticipated the form until it had occurred, and every time I think of this ritual I bring new understanding to it. Form, I have learned, can be rich, textured, layered, brimming and bitter-sweet.

In this piece of writing I discovered relationships and created a

mythology that announces a hermeneutic understanding.

Personal Myths: Making Meaning From Our Lived Experiences

Form, in the context of ritual, is the practice of discovering "our own biography" (Langer. 1953. p. 400). The stories that are told become our personal curriculum. Indeed, Yamagishi, Houtekamer, Goodstriker, and Chambers (1995) believe that:

> The curriculum has always been a series of stories and myths...[and] the myths of our curriculum need to acknowledge all of our relations and relationships. In examining our myths this way, we may be able to conjure up the balance between the mundane and the sacred, a balance necessary for us to live well with ourselves and with others. (p. 77)

Rituals are opportunities to study. Within this form we attend to our own narratives, the myths that determine our histories, our present relationships and ourselves as we consider our futures. Form provides the links, the network that binds us in thoughtful ways to each other and gives meaning to our lives.

Langer (1953) suggests that "Life is incoherent unless we give it form" (p. 400). When we understand our lives in the context of relationships we are making who we are understandable. Using form we create a shape, an image of ourselves, and we give a home to our story.

Tomas Moore (1992) would call this the "vernacular life of the soul" (p. 203). It seems as we become a busier, more technological community, we are losing the ability to interpret our ordinary lives deeply in extraordinary ways. Universal myths have always allowed us to explore themes of human life. They take us outside of ourselves, side step conflict and differences to get to the "great themes of human experience" (p. 221). Personal myths allow us to

articulate the fundamental truths about our natures, to amplify our imaginings, and to safely explore "our own special demons and divine figures, our own other-world landscapes and struggles" (p. 223).

Moore believes that we are living out, often unconsciously, profound stories. He cautions that to do this without an awareness of the stories we are made of, is to be condemned to look no further than literal causes without the benefit of meaning and wisdom. He writes:

> Soul work involves an effort toward increasing awareness of myths that form the foundation of our lives, for if we become familiar with the characters and themes that are central to our myths, we can be free from their compulsions and the blindness that comes upon us when we are caught up in them." (p. 224)

Soul work can take on many forms. In my first year of teaching, Russell, a six year old tried to teach me about personal myths, their themes and the secrets that lie within them. "Writers' Workshop" was the form he used but the curriculum he chose to study was not clear to me for several years.

It began with giving all my students their own writing exercise book, designed so that the top half of each page was blank and the bottom half had lines for writing. I was just learning about whole language and writers' workshop and I invited the ten, "primary special education" boys to write whatever they wanted for twenty minutes. We discussed possible topics, they shared some ideas they had and I encouraged them to use a narrative form, writing only about what they had experienced. Those that found writing too difficult could draw. I had been told at one of my three afternoon workshops that with encouragement they would soon write the stories underneath the

pictures they were illustrating.

Every day we had writers' workshop. Every day the boys were eager for me to finish the little mini-lesson I would teach addressing problems of grammar or sentence structure so they could write or draw their stories, and every day my anxiety grew. Russell never wrote a word.

I would go to him as I did all the boys, and ask him what story he was drawing. He was keen to tell me but very reluctant to write about it. In fact, despite all my encouragement, cajoling and firm demands, he never wrote one word. He didn't seem to find the idea very compelling. He only wanted to draw. It certainly wasn't that the narrative was complicated, in fact it really never seemed to change much. When I arrived at Russell's desk he would look at me in the solemn way he had and tell me his story, flipping pages to keep the picture up to date with his monologue. His voice was deep and his presentation a little ponderous. The story line never changed.

There was a "bad guy," "a robber," who would rob people and often shoot at them. The police would be called, but he would get away. Every time the police would just about get him, the bad guy would sneak up a ladder or jump into a fast car and escape. This story would go on for several pages every day. Each page was filled with action; the robbery, the victims with their hands raised above their heads, the gun, the call to the police and the police arriving. Sometimes shots were fired. But always the robber got away.

I became very nervous that the children were not producing the kinds of written work displayed as student samples at the workshops I had attended. I was a first year teacher teaching a group of young boys who had already failed in the regular school system because their behaviour was deemed

unmanageable and now I was failing them. I could not make writers workshop work. After three months I stopped doing it. I always meant to go back to it, the boys certainly asked often enough, but phonics, spelling and grammar began to fill up the time. I felt that production had improved. And now Russell was writing words in his book.

It wasn't until several years later when I was working at another school, that I heard about Russell and his real story. There had been a bad guy in his personal life. He had tried to get the "police" to stop him several times but it seemed the authorities could not quite get him. The bad guy always managed to get away and "rob" again.

Russell had used the form of writers workshop and the location of a safe classroom to create a myth, to tell his story, to explore the relationships in his life, to dispense his own bit of wisdom and I think, to look for meaning in his situation. Given time to return to those themes over and over, he might have come to a new understanding, tested out new relationships and possibly found solutions. As Moore (1992) has pointed out, becoming familiar with the characters and themes that are at the center of our personal stories, frees us "from their compulsions and the blindness that comes upon us when we are caught up in them" (p. 224).

Russell helped me begin to understand how we create our own mythology, discover sacred relations and by attending to the meaning captured there, experience ritual.

Now I understand that form is determined by the writer, gathering together the objects of his craft, and with sometimes quick, sometimes contemplative gestures, putting configurations and symbols on the page. There is shape. The combining of words and images form a relationship. A story begins to unfold. The form is constructed by the pencil, the notebook,

the symbols and the boy. The location is the classroom. The ritual is the activity of bringing all these together; repeated over time and in one place, on one page, and interpreting the story, finding meanings in the myths. It has been transformed from pencil to parable. And it is the parable, the process and the recognition of its significance, that defines form and location. This is much more than a phenomenological activity. It is the place where our lived experiences are collected and interpreted and we come to understand ourselves and our world more fully.

The Hermeneutics of Song

The writing exercise had revealed a pattern of relationships in a very specific and personal form. Recalling Russell's lesson helped me to understand how the form reveals our personal myths and guiding parables. The work I did with Connie's [1] class put it all together.

Once every two weeks I went to Connie's class to sing with her students. There is not much time in the curriculum for this kind of pleasure so all of us appreciated and enjoyed it. Initially, I taught them a few very simple songs and chants around which we could learn the practice of singing together. I taught them the round, "Fire's Burning," and explained that we would always begin with this song to honour the tradition of song makers and story-tellers who have, over the centuries, gathered around fires to share their music and stories. I taught them a couple of quiet, softer songs to sing at the end of the class. One was a beautiful and compelling lullaby. Over the months certain songs took on significance. The lullaby became our "signature song" at the school Winter Celebration. "The Bear Song" was sung only when

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[1] Connie McGregor teaches early intermediate aged children in a Vancouver school. Her beliefs about children and teaching created a receptive classroom environment and supported the kind of experience we had together.

Mary was there. It was "her" song because it made her laugh uncontrollably the first time we sang it. She had had to concentrate very hard on the words so she could master its meaning in her new language. When she did, she understood the joke several seconds after most of the class, and with her hand clamped tightly over her mouth, her joyful giggles became part of our shared history. Lucas appropriated a rap song. His solemn leadership and clear voice gave dignity and finesse to his delivery. This small boy would slowly and self-consciously move up beside me, and I would give him the front of the room. With his head down, his face very still, he snapped his fingers and led the song. His classmates respectful participation made a new place for Lucas in the classroom that he had not experienced prior to this. He accepted his new role during these times quietly but rightfully. Beyond this room he was becoming a legend in the office, but this was a new more powerful legend he was part of creating for himself. Lucas was the song.

We did not sing every song every time. The students came to realize that certain songs had to be earned, kept special. Some songs came to mean certain things to particular children, and so many songs came to be significant reminders of people or incidences. A song became a point of reference. The music blended with the language and culture of the classroom.

This Thursday event became sacred. The children looked forward to it, and at times their day, like mine, was transformed because of it. It had become a ritual. Connie and I spoke about this transition from ordinary to special. As we talked, I began to comprehend the concept of form and location.

The event had no ego, no apparent center and no one person defined it. Certainly, I arranged it. I always began with "Fires Burning," directed the order somewhat, and ended with a quiet song. Still, when we were singing, the music was the center. It created a common place among us, a shared

image, a sensation, a reference point. Children connected to it throughout the day and during the week. During math you could sometimes hear a of scrap of verse, a fragment of melody while the concept of place value was being wrestled with.

The relationship between each of us and the songs gave us a form. We were the composers in a way—the way we linked one song to another altered the form—shifting our relationships by rearranging the harmonies. At first, I thought the classroom was the location. And it was. Yet, we were the location too. The classroom was the location for the form, where we sang songs as a group. Yet, we were an interpretive location, considering each song in relation to ourselves and each other. The relationships between us and the music became strong and dynamic. The more time that went by, the more the classroom celebrations and individual personalities entwined with the music, and the more the relationship to the music took on meaning. In June, we changed the location to camp. Now these songs have a history altered by new experiences and new stories. Camp was a new interpretive location. Our coming together on those Thursdays left behind an imprint, an image, a history of the form we had created and any new location will embrace the old myths in new ways.

Langer (1953) explains that an image is "something that exists only for perception, abstracted from the physical and causal order, it is the artists creation" (p. 47). The image is not a new "thing," it comes from the paints, the canvas, the creator. They have not been added to.

> But even the forms are not phenomena in the order of actual things, as spots on a tablecloth are; the forms in a design - no matter how abstract - have a *life* that does not belong to mere spots. Something arises from the process of arranging colours on a surface, something that is created,

> not just gathered and set in a new order: that is the image. It emerges suddenly from the disposition of the pigments, and with its advent the very existence of the canvas and of the paint "arranged" on it seems to be abrogated; those actual objects become difficult to perceive in their own right. A new appearance has superseded their natural aspect. (Langer, 1953, pp. 47-48)

In ritual, as in art, each form has a life that is not simply the song or the singer. Ritual arises from the process, from the creation of form, the arranging of each object, the travelling between one point and another, one relationship and the next. The journey becomes our score. When the journey is ended the meaning created supersedes the meaning of individual things. It is held in the understanding of lineage—the web of relationships which defines how we come to know ourselves and the way we tell the kinship stories arising from the journey we have taken—from the songs we have sung.

Form, is similar to Gadamer's (1991) notion of the hermeneutic circle discussed briefly in the previous chapter. When we sing together on Thursdays we bring to it the memories of last week, and of our winter performance months before. We bring to it also, our anticipation of singing around the fire at camp next month. We think about this in light of an incident at school which has left one of our members suspended for three days. We sing a song for that child and the song now has new meaning, new significance. Sumara (1996a) would describe this as hermeneutic because our "Past experiences and knowledge are now viewed in light of new understanding and are, therefore, reinterpreted and understood" (p. 5).

I have come to believe that ritual creates the possibility for us to think deeply, hermeneutically. Ritual does not try to describe the world as it is, rather it is always trying to understand what is, who we are, and what we

know by interpreting ourselves through an ever changing lens. Sumara (1996a) suggests that hermeneutics "is not an act of abstracting our understanding from the world in order to say what the world is *really* like. Nor is it understanding any sort of reproductive activity" (p. 118). Rather, it is as Gary Madison (1988) suggests, that "To understand an experience, to reconstruct the past, is not to 'represent it' to ourselves; it is to transform it" (p. 189).

Transformation occurs because of the dynamic nature of form and location. David Smith (1991) in his discussion of hermeneutics, observes that, at the instance that form is taking shape we are on the threshold of "creating meaning" (p. 201). Hermeneutics requires the interpretation of the form and an understanding of it in light of lived experiences in order to transform the moment. This kind of inquiry changes the event from a one dimensional view to an interactive and intertextual experience. That is, our personal stories, overlaid by new knowledge, in turn, become new understanding.

In the story of Russell, transformation may have taken a long time although it might have been occurring every day of writers' workshop. There is no doubt that he was making meaning, and his experience was both interactive and intertextual, his own story being woven into the mythology he was creating.

Transformation begins, and for some, may happen, right there in the middle of the song. This is a process of becoming, at the edge of comprehension—because, as described earlier, form cannot be fully realized until it is formed, complete. For deep meaning lies in the relationships inherent in the form and those are only known to us as the form is taking shape and after, when we reflect on what we have created and participated in. Form and location provide the structure for transformation to occur, but the

child only finds meaning after she has experienced it.

The form which emerges cannot occur without a location. In the next section, location will be the focus of three narratives. Using ideas inherent in the concepts of mindfulness, dwelling, and homecoming, I offer three stories as locations for interpreting them. They are like the sharps and flats that help define the melody. Two stories are taken from novels. In the first, Sal, a young girl, creates a powerful ritual to collect and interpret the myth that has grown up around her mother's leaving her. The second is about another character, the English patient, whose 'commonplace' book is an interpretive location for coming to understand ourselves in relation to the world. The last story, is again from the work of the four Alberta women. It is Houtekamer's (1995) interpretation of a dream-catcher as a form and a location for transforming the ordinary into the sacred.

Location

Location is the mediator between the object, the perceiver and the set of relationships created by these interactions. It is notebook, classroom carpet or the last night at Indian Rock. It is Cynthia Chambers' (1995) dashboard, home to a stone from that "slow bend in the South Saskatchewan River" (p. 97). It is the the metal trunk which mediates where the name tags are ordered and understanding is sought after. This is location. This place is indescribable in ordinary language. It is an invisible knowing which Sharon Butala (1994) struggles to identify:

> We use words like "awareness," "perception," "sense," or "intuition," or a "sixth sense." They are as close as our language, as far as I know, allows us to come to describe that way in which we apprehend experience that is out of the realm of the ordinary. None of these words

> seem quite sufficient. And as for describing the quality of the experience, its texture, colour and the accompanying emotion, the way it permeates our being and floods us with new knowledge/awareness/perception, it seems impossible to find the right words and a way of structuring them that will make our listeners believe us." (p. 65)

It may be fragments of what Thich Nhat Hanh calls "mindfulness," or Heidegger's (1977) idea of "dwelling" (pp. 319-340). It may be a piece of Carollyne Sinclaire's (1994) notion of "home" or what Sumara (1996b) calls a "commonplace" location. If I understand location from these perspectives, I will see how each bit fits together. When I look at the finished piece I may recognize my own locations for private rituals, for profound insight and come to understand those of my students.

Mindfulness

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Buddhist monk, writes that *mindfulness* is the ability to be in the present; "When we want to understand something, we cannot just stand outside and observe it. We have to enter deeply into it and be one with it in order to really understand" (p. 100). It is a state of receptiveness where wisdom dwells. He considers mindfulness as a condition of meditation brought about by the act of conscious breathing. He believes anyone can experience mindfulness without the benefit of a special mat or designated time or place for meditation. Indeed, he suggests that washing dishes mindfully can be as sacred an act as the lighting of candles and incense.

When someone is mindful they possess a particular awareness, an attitude which is alert yet restful and calm. Mindfulness can occur anywhere and we can be brought to it with simple reminders. Hanh (1991) describes how bells are used at the monastery to summon the listeners to mindfulness.

In his tradition, bells, like sacred objects, are reminders to return to the moment. Each time a bell is sounded, he stops, focuses on his breathing and sometimes recites this verse:

Listen, Listen.

This wonderful sound brings me back to my true self. (p. 18)

He notes that there are not many bells rung in the West, but in Europe there are church bells everywhere!

Mindfulness is both an instrument for interpretation and a location for what Natalie Goldberg (1993) calls "root thoughts" (p. 92). She explains that we usually have "second and third thoughts, thoughts on thought." But a "root thought" is that raw thought which comes from deep within us. Root thoughts are a particular kind of knowing which occurs in a place and time. I think it is similar to Butala's (1994) conception of "the place deep inside where ones real life goes on, much like an underground river in parched dry country, which flows whether one knows about it or not" (p. 40). Root thoughts do not occur amidst the disorder and commotion of everyday. They dwell in the stillness, the place in the middle, which mediates when all the elements of ritual are engaged.

Dwellings

"Dwelling" is an important concept in Heidegger's (1977) inquiry into the meaning of building and dwelling (pp. 319-340). 'Building', originates from the German word "baun," meaning to dwell. "Bauen" means to "cherish, protect, preserve and care for." Interpreting Heidegger's work, Sumara (1996 a) explains that we are dwellers and we construct locations to dwell in. Dwelling in a space is how we linger in and explore paradoxical places; places that can be both comfortable and uncomfortable at the same

time (pp. 160-161).

Earlier it was pointed out that human beings need to symbolize to think. We need to make sense of ourselves, our relationships and our place in the universe. At its best a location for ritual constructs something familiar in order for us to dwell in the unfamiliar. We can't help but find locations for mindfulness, particularly in the kind of contemplation that occurs in the middle of ideas. We need dwelling places to listen carefully—mindful of the present—yet a place where we are drawn inexplicably and repeatedly into our past by the artifacts and gestures we find to place us there.

Sal's Story

Location is at the heart of ritual. We do not see it; rather we come to know it by thinking around the edges of it. In Sharon Creech's (1994) novel, *Walk Two Moons*, Sal is struggling hard to come to terms with her mother's leaving. Certainly, she cannot "get on with her life" until she can understand her mothers'life; she needs to climb inside and dwell in that understanding. Although she may come to some very uncomfortable realizations, Sal has created a ritual that is comfortable and familiar. She writes in her journal about watching her mother. Her recollections act to "locate" her mother and to dwell there, to be both mindful of her and to try and understand something about her:

> As she approached the corner of the barn where the sugar maple stands, she plucked a few blackberries from a stray bush and popped them into her mouth. She looked all around her—back at the house, across the fields, and up into the canopy of branches overhead. She took several quick steps up to the trunk of the maple, threw her arms around it, and kissed that tree soundly.

Later that day, I examined this tree trunk. I tried to wrap my arms about it, but the trunk was much bigger than it seemed from my window. I looked up at where her mouth must have touched the trunk. I probably imagined this, but I thought I could detect a small dark stain, as if from a blackberry kiss.

I put my ear against the trunk and listened. I faced that tree squarely and kissed it firmly. To this day, I can smell the smell of the bark—a sweet, woody smell—and feel its ridges, and taste that distinctive taste on my lips.

In my mini journal, I confessed that I had since kissed all different kinds of trees, and each family of trees—oaks, maples, elms, birches—had a special flavour all of its own. Mixed in with each tree's own taste was the slight tang of blackberries, and why this was so I could not explain. (pp. 105-106)

For Sal, each tree was a location to "be" with her mother. Like the bell, each tree was a reminder not to stand outside of the thing but rather, to enter into the experience in order to deeply understand it. Each kiss was a gesture which gave her the past and placed her in the present Every tree embodied both old and new knowledge and every kiss mingled with the new smells and tastes she discovered as she engaged each new tree. Sal allowed herself to dwell in the tree. It was at once familiar and unfamiliar. And, like returning home, it needed to be entered over and over as she tried to understand something of her past, in order to make sense of her present and her future.

Returning Home

Sinclaire (1994) describes home as:

that which provides us with the sense of communion with others that

helps the individual self emerge. Home helps us become conscious of the world around ourselves and establish an identity with others. ... Home calls to each of us as a search for the familiar, the intimate, the safe, the place where one can take risks. ..." (pp. 10-13)

Mary Catherine Bateston (1989) writes that "Much of traditional schooling is concerned with making children devote themselves to studies that make no sense in the context of their lives" (p. 198). One of our jobs as teachers is creating space where students can find locations for interpretive work—where personal knowledge can find a place in our institutions (something I discuss a little more in the last chapter). Locations for ritual can provide what Bateston describes as "homecoming," going back to where we began, and knowing it again, for the first time.

If home is location, than homecoming is the many ways we return, constructing our understandings and strengthening our capacity to be actively involved in the complexities of our social, emotional and spiritual environment. If homecoming is the process of arriving, then home is the experience of having arrived. Certainly Sinclaire is right when she states that we are "called" there. I was called to those objects on my dresser which helped me explore my relationship with my mother as Russell was called to his exercise book to explore his understanding of the "robber" in his life. Location calls us to a place which is common to all the pieces, and given all the pieces we create ritual to explore more deeply our place in the world.

The Commonplace Book

Having been introduced to the concept of a 'commonplace book' as a home for collecting and rethinking ideas in order to understand something better, I had both a place to collect data, and a new way of understanding

location. Sumara (1996a) encounters the commonplace book in Michael Ondaatje's (1992) novel, *The English Patient.* Here, one of the main characters, badly burned in a plane crash, takes with him from the crash, a copy of Herodotus's *The Histories,* a book he has carried with him for the past thirty years while exploring the North African desert. It becomes apparent that, during those years, he read and reread sections of the book. As he travelled, he scribed comments in his own hand, kept newspaper clippings, sketched maps in the margins and generally added to the book until it had doubled in size. The character calls it his "Commonplace Book," and over time while he is recovering from his injuries and is unable to communicate, the other characters in the story come to know him by reading this text. Sumara (1996b) suggests that:

> This commonplace book becomes an interpretive location for him and the others. By reading aloud from it, and noticing the additions the English patient has made, the others in the villa come to learn about him and, most significantly, begin to understand the past in relation to the present and the projected. (p. 45)

Sumara uses the commonplace book as a tool for his students. He helps them understand it as a location for "hermeneutic interpretation." The location for ritual acts in much the same way. Location becomes the home for gathering the fragments of insight, stories and memories. It is a commonplace, a place for interpretation of these things we have gathered and like the commonplace book, it is not the thing itself—not the songs, the trees or our families' homes—it is the getting there and the complex relations that collect there because of its presence. Location can be small, simple fragments that are out of our "ordinary" or complicated events with glittering objects and expansive gestures. The thing that is common to both is this particular

kind of knowing which transforms and announces itself as sacred, something apart. Sacred objects and gestures give expression to the experience—the form it takes gives it definition— and the location provides an interpretive commonplace, a home for understanding the complexities of our personal stories.

Tweela Houtekamer's Dream-Catcher

Location is the space we revisit, reinterpret, reconnect and revise. It is a deeply hermeneutic experience when understood as ritual. It is like the dream-catcher described by Tweela Houtekamer (1995). Wandering away from the circle and source of the powerful drum beat and the rhythmic chanting at a local Pow-Wow, Tweela Houtekamer entered the craft tent and saw the most beautiful dream-catcher she had ever seen. She wrote that it had

> thread arms spiralling out from the centre, in opposing directions, crossing each other, intersecting, connecting, creating a beautiful web with here and there a sparkling bead, a carved bone, a beautiful feather.
>
> It struck me how this dream-catcher could easily be a metaphor for my autobiographical writing. Each connection made creates a web that catches more memories, surprised out of forgetfulness. Each memory changes the process of restoring the memories long held, might even change the direction of the weave itself. In that sense, then, the dream-catcher becomes a dream-weaver. As we change our stories about our pasts, as we create nets of thought, memory, and new knowledge, we change our understanding of and our actions in the present moment, and our visions of ourselves in the future. (pp. 98-99)

I have read no more exquisite description of hermeneutics as it relates to location and I can offer no better metaphor for location as it relates to

ritual. For if the dream-catcher is the location and the form is the connecting, intersecting web adorned with beautiful artifacts, than ritual is the dream-weaver, helping us dwell in a place long enough to live through a changing and often unfamiliar landscape. It is the dream-weaver who mediates and transforms all the bits and pieces into a homecoming.

CHAPTER VI

Transformation: The Unbroken Circle

To transform means to change the character or nature of something. Transformation, understood in the context of ritual, is the complex activity of altering the integrity of an event by engaging all the participants in a very particular way and making us "able to see what [we] had previously been unable to see" (Sumara,1996a, p. 231). To fully appreciate the nature of transformation it is important to understand it from the outside inward using narrative—giving it form and character as a way of defining it. For although each of us "knows" the experience, it has about it a kind of mystery, and trying to capture and contain it requires imagination, insight, belief and emotion. Each of these must be engaged.

All the parts of ritual—the objects, the gestures, the form and location—when brought together for the purpose of ceremony, celebration, or reflection creates a metamorphic event. A change occurs where all the parts—the perceiver of the these things and the things themselves—interact and become whole. It is then that a third thing emerges. The process is "transformation" and the third entity is "meaning."

By defining transformation, reconsidering engagement, reinterpreting time and revisiting the concept of hermeneutics, this discussion will have completed a metaphoric circle. This is a circuitous and evocative path, which I believe takes us all, teacher and student, more deeply into the meaning of our lived experience and reconnects us finally, with ourselves.

Somewhere on a continuum between the concepts of transubstantiation (where certain ritual acts can substantially change the quality of the objects) and consubstantiation (where certain ritual acts can

cause a perceptual change of the objects) lies the notion of transformation. In transformation nothing substantial has changed about the one perceiving and participating in ritual, yet everything suddenly feels very different. The transformation is not of the event nor of the person but of the relationship between the person and the event. There is both a substantive and qualitative change to the space and the person occupying it. As Sumara (1996) points out, "We are transformed and so is the space we occupy" (p. 87), for, what was once a location for teacher and students to perform certain curricular driven tasks, has been changed into a location for ritual activity; the teacher and students are now agents in the change. The quality of the location is also different because the quality of the activity is different.

Moore and Myerhoff (1977), anthropologists who have studied rituals within other cultures, have observed that transformation—one of the most analytically elusive consequences of ritual (p. 13)—creates this qualitative difference. They consider transformation to be a state of mind which occurs when there is a fusion with the participants—creating a whole—where emotion and imagination are spontaneous and fluid. Transformation is not commanded. It is invited and welcomed. It occurs when our imaginations are fired, our emotions are called upon and our beliefs are re-considered.

It is not surprising that their explanation for transformation is not unlike the earlier discussion of engagement. When we are engaged, our imagination is fired, and we become undifferentiated with the objects and gestures that brought us to this location. "Imagination," explains Kieran Egan (1992), "lies at a kind of crux where perception, memory, idea generation, emotion, metaphor, and no doubt other labelled features of our lives, intersect and interact" (p. 3). These are the features we hope are "fired" in our students and they certainly are central to this discussion of ritual. When we

can imagine in this way, that is, to "think of it as possibly being so" (p. 36), we are allowing ourselves to conceive of things as having possibility and we are practicing engagement.

When engaged there is a continuity of experience, a kind of joining the perceiver with the world in complex and reciprocal relationships. Berleant (1991) attributes this experience to our ability to empathize. To be engaged is to involve the whole person, moving beyond a mental engagement to something he explains as the notion of *Einfuhlung,* developed by Theodor Lipps (1903-1906). Berleant explains empathy as a drawing together of an object with the feeling of pleasure, in a single act. "Empathy is the fact that the antithesis between myself and the object disappears, or rather does not exist" (Lipps, pp. 376-379). It is a dynamic encounter bound up with the symbols, resulting from them and being inseparable from them.

Empathy, suggests Berleant (1991), is the "activity of feeling oneself" into the sacred object, an "activity that engages not just our attention but also kinesthetic sensations" (p. 17), what has earlier been described as symbolic gestures of ritual. Our empathic responses bring about meaning which is then held in our perception of the object. Our bodies remember the touch, the movement, and the feel of the activity and the things used to represent it. And so, feelings not only engage us, they also help define the activity in terms of significance, perception, memory and the generation of new knowledge. Feelings are transforming agents.

As Egan (1992) suggests, "Our relations with the world around us, and our manner of making sense of our experience, are profoundly mediated by our emotions" (p. 70). It is worth noting that as teachers we often avoid situations with an emotional component, yet here is a tool for engaging children, enhancing memory, and mediating lived experiences. The

apprehension we feel when engaging childrens' feelings are likely founded in our own fears. We believe we must be neutral, passionless educators providing flat surfaces upon which to learn. We take the lumps and bumps out of much of teaching suspecting as Sumara (1996) does "there is not room in the school classroom for life that is infused with the kind of passion that goes along with having a body that expresses emotions" (p. 4). And, because we fear that we might be unable to cope with the raw feelings of our students, while being mortified that our own feelings might reveal something unteacherly about us, we squeeze a little life out of our classrooms. This creates an awkward pedagogical dilemma because if, as Egan (1992) suggests:

> we accept that imaginative engagement is a necessary condition of educationally valuable learning then we will want to find ways of ensuring a place for emotion, for engaging with students' hopes, fears and intentions, and for evaluating qualities of experience and richness of meaning." (p. 52)

Ritual, because of its engaging, evocative nature can transform spaces, making classroom experiences richer. My recent return to memories of the last few months with my special education class has helped me "feel my way into" this space and the related themes mentioned earlier; sharing emotional space with children, ordinary versus extraordinary time and the wonder of making meaning. All this is contained in and beyond my recollections here.

It was to be my last year with these seven remarkable boys and it was this fact, among all the other "good reasons," that led my teaching partner and I to coerce an indispensable parent to join us on a class camping trip. Because of their varied needs and concerns we knew we had to find a particular place yet we wanted them to have an outdoor experience. Fortunately, a friend was willing to let us use her family's cabin—an old three bedroom cottage, with a

huge stone fireplace, a telephone, full kitchen, bathroom, large back deck and an ample yard, large enough for four tents, each with an expansive view of Georgia Strait. The ocean, sliding up and down the rocky beach met the yard just below the retaining wall; it was right there waiting for sneakered feet, poking sticks and tossed stones. This was a much loved place, full of good will. The boys loved it on sight.

They were in charge of everything. And everything was a challenge. Making telephone calls, writing letters, creating lists and grocery shopping. These were all things that they were able to do with much coaching, support, cajoling and furrowed-brow. In the end, each had a binder with copies of the letters they had written to Sally, the co-owner of the cottage, the B.C. Ferries corporation, the Public Relations Officer at the mill. This book also contained the menu, shopping list and phone number of the horse rentals, as well as their biology unit and journal pages. Two days before we left we gathered all the gear, set the tents up in the classroom, and did the grocery shopping. We were ready to sail.

The weather was bright and clear every day and every day was full. We did chores, cooked, cleaned bathrooms, laid the evening fire and tidied tents for inspection. We ate together outside on the deck, visited a mill, went horseback riding and did a six kilometer hike to see a set of ocean rapids. We sang loudly, raucously every time we boarded our little bus. We learned about isthmus, rip tides and crustaceans. We learned about accountability, courtesy, community and ritual.

Every night we sat around the big outdoor fire and sang. The fire was wonderful, the moon was full, and the sky more star-brilliant than most of them had ever seen. At bed time, with cocoa in hand, I read to them. On our last morning, the cabin cleaned, a new fire laid for the next people, and gear

all stored away, we gathered on the warm grass still flat from the tents. I asked them which song they wanted to sing to bring closure to this trip. They had to choose carefully for it had to be one that had come to mean something special. They chose "The Rain Song," a lovely, melodic chant using hands as instruments to create rhythm and the sound of rain. Each of us said something about what the three days had meant. They were thoughtful, awkward, and funny remarks. And then Tomàs spoke in his crisp clear manner, his voice choked with feeling.

"Every time I hear 'The Rain Song' I will remember the campfire and how, when I looked over my shoulder at the water at night, I saw the beautiful moonlight sparkling on it. That's what I will remember the most."

And then, on the warm grass in a little ragged circle, we sang "The Rain Song," and Tomàs had tears in his eyes.

Tomàs' words and the contribution each of us made captured the wonder and awe we felt at the end of the trip. The summational words were like a eulogy, sweet and wise. And each contribution in some way embraced the work, the planning, the impatience and the successes we all felt at one point or another along our way. In our words, we heard the prodding, encouraging, rejoicing. We remembered hurt feelings and good feelings too. Each feeling became part of the mystery of ritual where boundaries are less clear and all feelings are valued as important and essential to this greater, bigger experience. This, of course, is never articulated, it is felt. Indeed, feelings are at the very center of this discussion, and we will return to them again when we look once more at the hermeneutic nature of ritual. For now, it is enough to say that feelings are stewards of engagement.

Each event, from writing to the B.C. Ferry Corporation to calling Sally by name engaged one or more of the boys, bringing them into relationship

with the symbolic steps, the duties they had to perform before the trip could be realized. Each encounter was like a turn on a kind of metaphoric path filled with challenge, anticipation and just hard work. The students were presented with many artifacts with which they could engage. And all the activities—shopping, tent making and fire building—gave rise to kinesthetic sensations, engaging their attention and inviting them into the world in complex patterns of reciprocity, each student giving and taking meaning, recording it in their bodies as well as their hearts and minds. In retrospect, I see that all the activity prior to and during the trip was collecting, identifying and interpreting lived experiences, and each experience, when gathered together around a tide pool or campfire allowed for ritual to occur. And in the process the event was transformed.

When I return to the cabin, as I do every summer, my attention is held for a moment by the outdoor fireplace. Images and insights from that camping trip return, playing back scenes, not as they were, but as I remember them. From this remembered landscape I can isolate still shots. Every year my understanding of them changes somewhat as I bring to old memories new information about my teaching. These feel like the echoes that Egan (1992) describes when explaining the workings of our imagination:

> Some of the images we experience seem "echoes" of what we have perceived, though we can change them, combine them, manipulate them to become like nothing we have ever perceived. Our memory seems to be able to transform perceptions and store their "echoes" in ways that do not always or perhaps very often require quasi-pictorial "images" ... (pp. 3-4)

This ability to hold time still in order to transform the memory into new insights is like a trick with light and shadow.

During the camping trip time was often out of step. I do not recall it as three days preceded by several weeks of preparation and quickly completed when we arrived back at school. Instead, I remember it as a whole and complete event. I can, however, identify cultural objects which will take me to a specific location. When I think of the bus, for instance, I can turn it around and as I do I see it differently and see different things. The boundaries collapse and I can recall all the trips in those three days as one memory and I can choose to recall James, the song master in one recollection and big Mark, so noisy and joyful in another. Time has been altered.

Tomàs also stopped time. In his parting words he took all that he thought and felt and compressed it into a song and an image. Two months and three days were transformed. Those many hours had become a memory of moonlight on water and a song to sing. We paused with him there on the warm grass for an indeterminate period of time. Sumara (1996a) writes about this transformation of ordinary time into not ordinary time when he recalls reading *Bridge to Teribithia* (1977) to his grade seven students. It was a passage he had read many times before, but this time it moved him differently and his feelings were evident to his students:

> As I finished reading that chapter, I realized that reading this book with these students had been a moment removed from the dailyness of classroom life. For a few seconds it had been quieter than usual; there had been less shuffling, less movement. Time had slowed down. We had entered a world of what Margaret Hunsberger has called "not-time"—a world where the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction become blurred. (p. 3)

For Sumara and his students nothing substantial had changed; he still held the book, they remained in their desks, light continued to enter the

room through the windows. Yet, something significant had changed; everything had changed. They felt more deeply, understood more profoundly, and remained in that moment a little longer than was actually possible. They held very, very still because they were engaged and the moment had been transformed by the ritual of shared reading; transformed from something ordinary to something meaningful,communal and understood.

Hunsberger's (1995) concept of "not-time" is integral to the concept of transformation and the phenomenon of ritual. Indeed, as Etienne Souriau (1958) suggests, "Every work of art creates its own universe. And whoever speaks of a universe speaks of a whole built upon a space-time net-work" (p. 122). Ritual, is the gathering of all the parts into a whole, a collapsing of time and events, making our universe smaller, attainable and all the mysteries contained within this network of space-time is brought home to us as meaning.

I wonder now how the boys made meaning of our adventure together. I wonder how they remember it. Sumara (1996b) wrote, when explaining the function of the "commonplace" book in Ondaatje's novel, that "this commonplace book becomes the interpretive location for him and others" (p. 45) and later, on the same page he describes it as a location to "collect and mediate participants past, present, and projected experiences." I suppose the boys experienced their binders as a kind of "commonplace book," a place to collect the artifacts of their journey and to interpret their experiences. Had I understood the concept of hermeneutics as it relates to ritual, I may have been more skillful, more intentional in helping them use their journals to construct knowledge. Had my own knowledge allowed, I could have supported them more consciously and so, through the process of engagement

and transformation, making meaning might have been an even richer experience. However, we had the rituals of preparation, participation and perception and during the final coming together we created a circle on the grass that acted both literally and figuratively as a location for collecting, mediating and interpreting our pasts, present and futures.

Transformation, as it occurs in ritual, is the activity of making meaning. Ritual, like the "commonplace" book in *The English Patient* (1992), or the trees marked with the memory of blackberry kisses, or the meeting place under the beautiful folds of a parachute, is a collection of cultural or sacred objects, gestures or kinesthetic movements, constructed of emerging relationships and located here in the place where these things intersect with a sense of wonder and awe, which the actor and participant brings to this common place. It is right here, where meaning is made.

It helps me in my own evolution to return to the concept of the hermeneutic circle because I believe it is the framework which gives us the pedagogical structure and intellectual bridge needed to understand ritual performance in classrooms. When we make meaning, our starting- point is our lived experience which we bring to the 'object' of our interest or intentions. We inform this location, this starting place, with our prior knowledge and beliefs. Once engaged our understanding is modified, influenced and often transformed, consequently altering or redefining our starting-point. As Paul Crowther (1993) explains, "It involves proceeding from some foreknowledge of the object, to a consideration of it in the light of those aspects of tradition which are relevant to its interpretation" (p. 10). Our original understanding is transformed, changed by this somewhat altered interpretation. Our new perception "emerges in a gradual unfolding and clarification of its aspects, as the hermeneutic circle constellates around it.

Truth is seen as a continuing process of refinement, enrichment, and clarification" (p. 11). This dynamic of redefining through our lived experience in relationship with 'objects' is how meaning is made and it is also the embodying and unifying act of ritual. Hermeneutics is the transformation of our small circle on the last day of camping; it is what we understood; it is what we felt.

I wrote earlier that feelings were the stewards of engagement. Feelings are what determine which object we will attend to or the sorts of relations that we may come to know. It is our feeling of empathy with an object or event which engages us initially in what we have come to understand as an undifferentiated relationship between the perceiver and the thing itself. It is the feeling of wonder and awe, fired by our imaginations which keep us engaged and it is the jumble-box of feelings like melancholy, sorrow, serenity and joy that ritual embraces, letting us know that we are engaged and alive.

"Wonder," writes Egan (1992), "is the emotion evoked by perceiving something as extraordinary, or strange, or as an extreme achievement" (p. 78). Wonder is what my students felt on the bridge of the B.C. Ferry, Queen of Saanich, or laying the fire in the big outdoor fireplace and later, enjoying the enviable privilege of lighting it for all to see and enjoy. When squatting around a tide pool, observing the miniature life carrying on there, we felt wonder in the realization that this tiny world was indifferent to us. "Awe," Egan suggests, "is the emotion evoked by the perception, that beyond or beneath the real, tangible world around us, we are adrift in an ocean of mystery" (p. 78). Awe is what Tomàs tried to express that day on the warm grass.

Wonder is what children and adults bring to the ritual, and awe is the feeling they leave with. Whether it happens outdoors by the vast ocean or in

the more mundane world of the classroom, ritual is the transforming agent, and transformation takes us through and just beyond the hermeneutic circle into a place deeply felt and forever remembered.

CHAPTER VII

Into the Classroom

To educate as the practice of freedom is a way of teaching that anyone can learn. That learning process comes easiest to those of us who teach who also believe that there is an aspect of our vocation that is sacred; who believe that our work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of our students. To teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin. (hooks, 1994, p. 13)

Peter McLaren (1986) is resolute in his charge that ritual must be considered an integral part of school life. He writes:

> Schools must begin to give measurable shape to our dreams for a more just society by becoming not only the laboratories for critique, but also the strong holds for purposeful and life-giving symbols. The realm of school ritual must illuminate these symbols, fire them in the crucible of wisdom, and shape them on the anvil of liberation. Only then will we move confidently towards the brink of the fearful abyss that Victor Turner calls the antistructure, grab hold of that rope of snarled symbols, and propel ourselves to the other side where knowledge and freedom meet once and forever." (p. 256)

Although we may not refute the declaration that schools must be concerned with wisdom and liberation, knowledge and freedom, we certainly ought ask to what extent schools are expected to stretch themselves in order to embrace such elevated principles of learning. It is difficult to ignore such a directive and equally difficult to visualize how classrooms might appear as strongholds for purposeful and life-giving symbols. It will be asked if this is

just another whimsical avenue schools are being directed to explore with little thought or relevance to the principles of education. Yet, what better principles to orient a curriculum than those of wisdom, liberation, knowledge and freedom? And, if indeed schools and classrooms are appropriate locations for ritual, then what form would it take? McLaren's declaration is a compelling one. It raises many questions for discussion, the least of which is: Why ritual at all? Do we not in fact see fewer rituals both in homes and in our institutions than say, fifty years ago? It may well be that rituals no longer serve a purposeful function in our lives or the lives of our students.

Ritual as Purposeful Pedagogy

This seems to be a time in our culture when ritual has been replaced with deadlines, work schedules, no schedules, acting classes and language classes. Life is hectic. Two parents work to provide all the opportunities available for their children. One parent works just to pay for essentials. New Canadians work at unskilled jobs to make a place for themselves in a new culture which does not always recognize the skills they came with nor what traditions and values were sacrificed and left behind in their homelands. Some parents don't work and look for ways of escaping their feelings of impotence, isolation and hopelessness. Some work so much there is little room for anything else. In many families the parents and children no longer speak the same language. Sometimes this is because the children are learning English faster than their immigrant parents, and sometimes it is because the children live in a world so very disparate from the adults at home that although their language is linguistically the same, it is symbolically and socially different. Where family rituals once provided a form and location for shared, meaningful time together, now there may be only a note on the

counter, a message on the machine, a flashing light on a beeper, or nothing at all. Parents and children are very busy in an uncompromising world, trying to make things better, and in this process some things are sacrificed. Family ritual is frequently one of them. Unfortunately, it is not just the simple acts of a set dinner table or Sunday picnics, nor the gestures of lighting a candle or being tucked into bed that may have gone, it is all that those things embody—the evocative, imaginative and wonder filled place of making meaning. We are eliminating the ways we come to know. We are becoming less comfortable with each other and estranged from ourselves. If McLaren is right, if ritual keeps us from falling into "the fearful abyss," then we may be dangerously close to the edge. It is hard to sit quietly on the classroom carpet and concentrate on learning when you are looking into a deep void. Ritual is the bridge we build to cross over the abyss to new understanding. It is what connects us outwardly to our environment and inwardly to our souls.

Tomas Moore (1992) tells us that our souls have been neglected. "The soul," he explains, "needs an articulated world-view, a carefully worked out scheme of values, and a sense of relatedness to the whole" (p. 204). He contends that the soul also needs a spiritual life, one that can be provided by the traditions and values of the family. Ritual has been the activity families use to pass on many of the deeply felt values and traditions handed from one generation to the next. Family rituals have helped us come to know what we believe. Traditionally, ritual has been the keeper of our interior lives. Yet, as Moore suggests, "Most of our science, physical and social, operates as if there were no interior life, or at least assumes that the interior life has little or nothing to do with the outside world" (p. 205). And when and if it is acknowledged, it is usually secondary to the demands of friends, jobs, school or technology.

Mackey and Grief (1994), express deep concern for the loss of family rituals which they see as being "strongly tied to the families construction of reality" (p. 172). This may have occurred, at least in part, because of the changes in families mentioned earlier. Family configurations have also changed. Few retain the structure which fostered the passing on of traditions from generation to generation. It may be that new family constellations will need a great deal of support discovering new rituals which reflect their beliefs and values. Mackey and Grief consider rituals valuable both as way to help heal families and as a way to understand their dynamics. They suggest that schools can support parents to reestablish rituals by introducing regular shared meals, stories at bedtime and watching favourite T.V. shows together (p. 175). Their article certainly upholds the belief that our society is becoming "under ritualized" however, it raises again that uncomfortable question. Is ritual in the domain of schools?

At one time schools were steeped in ritual as evidenced here by Michael Oakeshott's (1962) rather wistful description of "School" as that of:

> an historic community of teachers and learners, neither large nor small, with traditions of its own, evoking loyalties, pieties and affections, devoted to initiating successive generations of new-comers to the human scene into the *grandeurs* and servitudes of being human; an *alma mater* who remembers with pride or indulgence and is remembered with gratitude. The marks of a good school are that in it learning may be recognized as, itself, a golden satisfaction which needs no adventitious gilding to recommend it; and that it bestows upon its *alumni* the gift of childhood recollected, not as a passage of time hurried through on the way to more profitable engagements, but, with gratitude, as an enjoyed initiation into the mysteries of a human

condition: the gift of self-knowledge and of a satisfying intellectual and moral identity." (p. 50)

Robert Cummings Neville (1993) believes that religious studies should be included in all university curriculum. Neville contends that study of universal religious practices provides "sophistication and depth" by supporting campus life in three areas: understanding, spiritual practice, and rituals. Indeed, he forcefully states that it is the responsibility of institutions of higher learning to contribute to those public rituals that recognize the cultural and spiritual dimensions of our lives. This is not a debate about the place of religion in schools nor is that the point here. Neville is as interested in the positive effects of ritual upon the intellectual and spiritual life of students as he is upon religious training. He is concerned with moral education and the teaching of virtues. He suggests that

> The university needs to develop rituals to define genuine righteousness regarding truth and justice, genuine piety regarding respect for all elements of life, genuine faith to engage life in its actual particularity, genuine hope for ultimate value, and genuine love for others, nature, for institutions and for God. (p. 171)

Although many consider this a dangerous topic, the moral life of children is a modern, urban concern, and concern for the teaching of virtues is very present in many schools both public and independent. It is written about in educational journals. In fact, much of the material we use in schools—peace education, environmental education, multicultural education, conflict resolution education, and family life education—are all concerned, to some degree, with the moral lives of children. Discussions about ritual practice as a means for teaching virtues and influencing moral development in our students will certainly stimulate a challenging and much

needed debate which extends beyond the limitations of this work. However, it is imperative that we do not ignore the fact that children have moral lives and are concerned with ideas and discussion regarding virtues. Schools can provide opportunities for them to strengthen, clarify, and nurture these essential and very personal inner spaces.

Schools were once very ritualized institutions. We must be cautious when considering whether they ought to be again. Some rituals can demoralize, restrict and inhibit, while others can be abusive, punitive and superfluous. McLaren (1989) is cautious even while he advocates for teachers to become ritually literate:

> I would argue that the instructional rituals must be approached with the realisation that they overwhelmingly influence the development of school spirit and the orchestration of the symbolic tonalities, chords and modulations which comprise the overall ethos of the school. A poor choice of ritual orchestration evokes a cacophony of discomfort among students. School instruction should—and here I can go no further than programmatic—become more of a celebration than a painful rite of passage. (p. 231)

"School spirit," "rites of passage," and "celebrations" seem like antiquated ideas. Many schools have eliminated these rituals to varying degrees, in favour of activities that are less competitive and more inclusive, more multicultural and less religious, more attention to a broader area of achievement and less scholarly. We may have been too quick, too sweeping in our efforts to change. We certainly tossed out the many communal rituals whose focus were team sports, academic achievement, and civic duty in favour of a more holistic, integrated student-centered, gender-balanced approach to teaching. In our eagerness to change and embrace all the new

challenges that have faced teachers and students in the past two decades, we may however, have weakened a support wall in our structure by neglecting the significant milestones, the public recognition, those big and small occasions that take notice of an individuals accomplishments, contribute to a community history, and are the rites of passage from childhood to young adulthood. In shifting our attention away from community celebrations and recognitions we may have forfeited the classroom celebrations and recognitions too. In these instances, we have given up a great deal. Yet, the stories in the previous chapters indicate that ritual can be found tucked into corners of our educational community, and where we find it, we find children engaged in meaningful, thoughtful, evocative learning. Like me, however, I suspect there are many teachers sharing rituals by instinct and would and could do more if given a broader, supportive and more theoretical base to rest upon. And, it would help a great deal if we all could witness "the story of it" skillfully woven into a bigger tapestry.

The last few chapters have unfolded a parachute and drawn together under its shelter a web of relationships rich with the lived experiences of children and adults making new meanings and shared history. Hopefully, the preceding discussion has, like the light filtering through the parachute, lit up this notion of ritual as pedagogy. Arriving at the "meeting place" has been a long and interesting journey, however there are still stories that need to be told. One more stone must be tossed.

This last stone is different. The subsequent ripples no longer seem to move out and disappear. Now they seem to be part of a pattern, rippling over other slow moving circles making new interconnecting links, one circle with another. This final narrative is like this. Careful attention will reveal ritual as the underlying structure, linked together by sacred objects, powerful gestures,

form, location and profound and delightful transformations all interpreted uniquely by a teacher and a small band of children quietly (and sometimes noisily) working hard at learning in its biggest, broadest sense.

The Walk to Hau'ula: A Story of Ritual with Children

The silent walk I took with my camp friends to Indian Rock many summers ago, was like a "participatory entrance" (Berleant. p. 99) to a path which eventually, twenty-five years later, took my teaching partner, Hugh and I, on a sort of pilgrimage to Hawaii. It was here that the distinctions between figure and ground became sharper. For here we met Elly Tepper, a phenomenal teacher who led me further along the way, and with her students confirmed for me what had felt so tentative. That ritual is pedagogy.

I left my small band of exceptional boys to take a two year position at a local university. I was one among many hired to work with student teachers during their professional year of pre-service teacher education. The university is built on the peak of a rather small but distinctive little mountain. It sits right on top, an interesting ugly duckling, all grey cement squares and rectangles enclosing ponds and plants, skylights and wide covered walkways, where sunlight filters in. As it turned out, it provided me with further opportunity to explore this idea of ritual in classrooms.

I was still certain that ritual had pedagogical value, and I could, when pressed, give some rationale for this. However, I really could not visualize nor articulate what I thought of it as an educational paradigm. It seemed that my colleagues that year had greater confidence than I in our tentative discussions. At the end of my first year our coordinator, Kau'i, suggested that my teaching partner Hugh and I pool our professional development money and travel to the village of Hau'ula on the island of O'ahu, to meet Elly

Tepper and her grade four students. It was a journey which has shifted the direction of my teaching career and continues to lead me down precarious paths whose destinations are always a little uncertain.

Before we left, Kau'i gave us an article Tepper (1991) had written which described her own nineteen year journey with her students. There were many things in the article that interested me but I found it hard to imagine what it "looked like" without the classroom context and so I set it aside to wait and see.

In Hawaii, the day before we boarded the local bus, I wrote in our journal, "Made our way into Honolulu (4:30 a.m.) and had breakfast looking out over Waikiki Beach. The pedagogical question of the moment is—What the hell are we doing this for?" The long, long bus trip the next day answered at least part of the question. The country side was spectacular and the rural community of Hau'ula on the north, windward shore of the island was a curious mix of "kept-up" beach cottages and "unkempt" homes strung along a beautiful shoreline.

In our journal, Hugh graciously describes our hotel as a "run down, character-filled place." Later, he notes that it is "best suited to Kraft dinner and vodka Caesars." However, we called it home and it is from "Pat's Place" we left early the next morning on foot, to walk the mile or so to our new school. We arrived hot, damp, and dusty, and were greeted by the office staff then taken immediately to our classroom. Our welcome there will be something I can never forget.

Elly Tepper, a dark haired middle-aged woman of medium height greeted us at the door with a hug. At first, she seemed rather out of context there. In her article, she describes herself as having been a college teacher, raised a child of eastern European immigrants in New York City. Her parents

had high academic and professional aspirations and Elly had been educated in private and specialized, experimental public school programs. Her words of welcome still held the soft intonations of a New York childhood. She presented us to the children and we were then led to our chairs by two students. Again, we were welcomed, although more formally, with a kiss, and a lei placed around our necks. We were called "aunt and uncle." We had begun our initiation into their family and felt honoured and a little overwhelmed.

Our first morning there happened to be a cultural day, a traditional class celebration. On this day all the children of Japanese decent gather at the front of the room. Whether they are full Japanese Hawaiian, or had a great aunt who was of Japanese decent, their heritage is recognized and they were supported and encircled by their classmates behind them. A woman had come to talk about how she celebrated and maintained her own Japanese heritage in Hawaii. She was asked to show cultural objects and explain their personal meanings. She spoke of the values she embraces from her Japanese roots and told some traditional stories. The children were respectful, extremely courteous and excited. They wanted to learn about themselves and they wanted the recognition from their classmates too. Each child, as a condition of membership in the class, learned of his or her cultural history. Throughout the year each culture's heritage is celebrated, each student is honoured and each child is understood more completely because of this ritual telling of personal stories and shared history. These children had come to understand their Chinese, Polynesian, Hawaiian, British and Japanese ancestry and to take from it the things that made their lives more meaningful.

The rest of week continued this way, brimming with evocative,

exuberant, thoughtful moments. These children were engaged with their work more often and more fully than any children I have seen before or since. And it was because ritual, in the fullest, broadest understanding was embedded in everything they did.

Math, for instance, was taught within a kinesthetic, ritualistic, and culturally rich framework. It always began the same way, every day. Elly used much of what she had read in books on educational kinesiology to educate her students about kinesthetic learning and to teach rituals for preparing oneself to learn. In order to get ready for a new subject, the students physically centred themselves, using a gesture which stimulates the brain, preparing it to attend. For math, they also sat in a position best suited for stimulating the part of the brain that does math. As they began to chant Hugh and I caught each others' eye. Elly drummed on a beaded gourd and together using a lovely Hawaiian melody, they chanted their times tables. Hugh and I joined in, it was hard not to.

So much of their culture was infused in their work. During a review period, Elly asked the children to get into their "canoe groups." Quickly, five "canoes" were ready in front of her, five or six "paddlers" in each boat. Each "paddler" was given a question to answer and each correct answer brought them closer to "shore." I was puzzled when the first boat, having answered all the questions correctly did not cheer, but rather turned in their canoe and enthusiastically began to call out encouragement to the other 'paddlers'. Only at the end did all the children cheer and clap. I learned that it is Hawaiian tradition that no canoe wins until all the boats have reached the shore.

All work was honoured, every child was respected, each achievement was noted and brought forward as something special. Each student was a contributing member of the classroom community. Much of their learning

occurred through stories; from the publishing every year of *Na Mo'olelo o Ko Makou 'Ohana,* the stories of Our Families , to the introspective writing that is ritualized as a private, thoughtful, special kind of work where the children learn to attend to and value their personal narratives and their evolution as reflective learners. Even stories that were read aloud from books were honoured. Hugh and I gave them a copy of Paul Yee's (1989) book, *Tales from Gold Mountain,* and we were asked to read aloud one or two of the short stories about the first immigrant Chinese in British Columbia who were called to Canada to build the railway. These are colourful, complex stories describing the difficulties, the mistreatment, the heartache and the humour of the first Chinese Canadians in this province. After each story the students quickly raised their hands. I was unprepared for what came next. Tommy wanted to be the first to tell what the lesson was. He identified the virtues needed by the Chinese men to survive the cruelty of the "white boss" and he shared the lesson he had learned. So did several others. These children had been taught to ask the question, "What is the lesson?" The words they chose captured the wisdom of a moral, and the graciousness of a blessing. I was astounded by their ability to interpret the text and moved by their humble pride in what they had learned.

Ritual was even a part of discipline. In her article, Tepper (1991) points out that she considers the underlying philosophy of classroom management and discipline more important than the family-like rituals. It seemed to me that one could not exist in this classroom without the other. I had known this close relationship between discipline and family rituals with my own students without understanding it in the context of a pedagogical infrastructure. Here it was. It was in the safety of the home-like atmosphere, in the rules they make together, and in the heart-felt belief that, no one is

"ever stuck with a mistake." For every test failed, there was one they could succeed at and for every time out "there is a time and a path to come back in" (p. 13).

The time out area is called, *pu'uhonua* which means refuge. For every *kapu* broken, the way to fix it is clear. There is a place and a time to heal and all children are restored to the harmony of the classroom. This philosophy evolved over time and was rooted in two cultural artifacts. The first, was an old lesson.

> The early ones taught that there is no dividing line between two people. You cannot hit your brother without hitting yourself, your father and your mother. It is best then, to hit no one. (p. 12)

So students always made restitution to their brothers and sisters. The other is a teaching parable. As Tepper (1991) explains:

> Each child born, has at birth, a Bowl of perfect Light. If he tends his Light it will grow in strength an he can do all things—swim with the shark, fly with the birds, know and understand all things. If, however, he becomes envious or jealous he drops a stone into his Bowl of Light and some of the Light goes out. Light and the stone cannot hold the same space. If he continues to put stones in the Bowl of Light, the Light will go out and he will become a stone. A stone does not grow, nor does it move. If at any time he tires of being a stone, all he needs to do is turn the bowl upside down and the stones will fall away and the Light will grow once more. (p. 13)

We were there to help with the traditional collective masterwork, *Ho'ike*, a show in which all the grade fours perform in traditional costumes. It is a 'rite of passage' and every single grade four student learns the mostly Hawaiian songs and all the dances . Each year's class has a theme that is then

expressed in the lyrics, the gestures, the dance steps and the speeches that are made. One year, for instance, it was *He 'ohana ho'okahi maoli no kakou apau- We, all of us, are truly one family.* All around the buildings and outside walls are displays of art, crafts and writing. All year the children have this "vision-goal" to work toward. Our last day there was the day of the *Ho'ike.*

Hugh was sent upstairs to help dress the boys in their traditional costumes and I stayed to help dress the girls. I felt I was one of many women, over innumerable generations, whose job it was to prepare young girls for this rite of passage. It was magical. The girls were nervous but unafraid and when they met the boys all dressed in their finest, they were joyful together and a little in awe of one another. The highlight for the children, once their own dances were performed, was the performance of the teachers and support staff. They too were in traditional dress, and there among them was Elly, the Jewish teacher from New York, dancing with the grace, solemnity, and warmth that the Hawaiian lyrics, the steps and the history of the tradition warranted. It was almost time for us to go. There was one more thing we all had to do before leaving.

Each year the children in Elly's class choose a name for themselves which describes the group self-concept and which is used to sign all group work. One class was called "The Class of Artists" while another called themselves, "Ka Papa Lokomaika'i," the "Kind Class." This created a sense of kinship which we felt all week but seemed its strongest in their "family circle," a Friday ritual where children and teacher can make amends to those they may have hurt or embarrassed unintentionally. Every child ended with a statement about what each hoped for while they were apart and their wishes for when they were together again. This was truly a transformation instance. In the song sung to us about sharing one's canoe and the "circle-words" full of

shy phrases, thoughtful comments, cautious meanings and kinship jokes—time had collapsed. I felt I had been with them for a season. We joined them in this affirmation and parting ceremony. And, just like the children, we were offered a hug or a handshake before we headed down the road for the last time. I thought my kind of quest would end there on the road. We had found the treasure. Instead I had found another 'participatory entrance'—a point of entry in the hermeneutic circle of inquiry—and consequently, into the meaning of ritual for classroom communities.

A Pedagogical Perspective, A Place to Dwell

We arrived with an article Elly had written. We left understanding it. The article is really a narrative, the journey she took to reach these children in her particular way. In her story she offers up the stepping stones that were most useful as she traversed new educational terrain and negotiated major changes in her teaching. Because our paths crossed, her journey became part of mine.

Tepper (1991) describes how she came to terms with being bumped to this remote job, an hour's drive from her home. She offers a framework, a structure, with a carefully constructed foundation that determines her educational beliefs. I offer it here, not as a formula, but as an impression, and imprint left behind and a vision projected forward which has helped me to construct appropriate pedagogical places to dwell.

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She begins by explaining her Phase 1, which was marked by the question: *"Who are these children?"* (p. 3). She spent a great deal of time asking and listening to the answers. She then describes Phase 2 of her learning as: *Reflection—I Learn More About What I KNEW an How to Use It*

(p. 5). Around these two locations for her hard thinking, she then organizes some significant insights from that period:

A. *"I ka nana no a 'ike—by observing, one learns"*

B. *"I ka hana no a 'ike—by practice one masters the skill"*

C. *"Never interrupt—wait for permission to ask questions*

D. *"Hawaiians gauged a child's age, not by years, but by...readiness to perform certain tasks. One of the old measuring-stick phrases computed age as "big enough to carry a small gourd full of water ..."* (p. 6)

Tepper describes Phase 3 as: *Analysis—I've learned More About Why We Learn and What That Can Mean* (p. 8). This part of her journey led her to what she calls, *A New* Phase 1: *What's Happening Now* (p. 11), which she gives meaning to under these notes to herself:

1. *Create a true classroom family*
2. *Teach Social Studies as an immersion experience—our culture is our" text."*
3. *Provide for and accommodate a social context for the language arts.*
4. *Go for the message—the WHOLE BIG IDEA—in every activity.*
5. *ntegrate the curriculum and make learning time, space, and purpose continuous-make school work look and feel like real work.*
6. *Plan and actualise "culminating activities" in which we produce big, collective, cooperative WORKS OF ART.* (pp. 13-17)

These are the implements of her journey, the tools of her trade, and they were offered to Hugh and I. I try them out and reshape them and fit them to myself, reflecting the lessons I learned in Hau'ula and continue to learn because we went. I hear in her work with the children the echo of ritual as pedagogy. The classroom held many sacred objects, each sharing meaning

with the students. The dance and use of kinesthetics were gestures that expressed the embodied language of the class. Every day had form and all learning was located in critical places. Transformation was not common but it was familiar and anticipated in particular moments and spaces. Here knowledge was interpreted and expressed metaphorically, narratively, experientially and personally. Ritual was the web that knitted it together.

Looking back, this notion of ritual appears very different than it did when I began. The objects I understood to be sacred were more conventional, and therefore set apart from my daily life. I have come to see my rituals as located not outside my day but central to it. Objects like my coffee mug, set beside my computer, my blue files on my left, the thumb-marked article, have become important patterns set down to unfold my thinking and to organize my time, to ready myself to write. Now, with each event in my life I look for the form it takes, where it is located. I look for the objects I am using, the gestures I make and this helps me to understand something new. The stories of my students, the trip to Hawaii, and my writing have become my sacred objects. I have returned to them again and again over the past four years and each time I have come to understand this concept of ritual a little more. These points of reference continue to be my sacred objects but the classroom is again my location for interpreting what I discern about ritual as an instrument for children's learning. I want it to be central to my teaching, my planning, and my curriculum.

"Journey" is one metaphor that reflects both my process for understanding these pedagogical rituals and is part of the language I use when considering how students might experience them. I describe it here as a model for classroom metaphor.

Ritual and Classroom Metaphor

Berleant (1991) believes that structures and landscapes engage us both cognitively and somatically. When considering this, he describes buildings as having participatory entrances—openings,doorways, archways, which act as invitations—drawing us in. These entrances do not oppose, confuse or obstruct us. They are not intimidating. Rather, they are a comfortable fit physically, giving us lots of room to pass through easily. They are inclusive and welcoming. Berleant further suggests that paths also act as invitations. He feels that we experience them as "living symbols that embody their meaning, symbols that make us act, make us commit our bodies, our selves, to choices" (p. 99). I wondered what participatory entrances I had created in my classrooms over the years that had extended this kind of invitation to my students.

Some paths or roads have forks which cause us to make choices, and some, as Bollnow (1961) points out, are paths not seeking a destination so much as offering a view or a place to rest and contemplate. And so we are invited to rest and enjoy the landscape the journey offers us. A bend in the road or a curve in the path appeals to us kinesthetically as much as visually. This invitation into a place to dwell, to walk, to journey is an appealing one. It helps me understand my students more as seekers of knowledge and adventurers. It changes the way I think about the curriculum and the way I interpret the activity of their learning. Pilgrimage has caught my imagination and I wonder if this image would provide the kinds of symbols which would satisfy my students' imaginations too.

McLaren (1986) suggests that the pilgrim affects an attitude of: "active waiting, hopeful expectation, power in innocence and weakness, and acceptance of strangeness of others as a possible source of transcendence"

(McLaren. p. 237). Urban Holmes, writes McLaren, states that:

> The pilgrim is an incongruous, ambiguous person, for whom no category fits. To be a pilgrim means to move out of the institutional structures and their roles and statues that define the person and to free the imagination for the discovery of what is new. (Holmes, as cited in McLaren, p. 272)

Oh to be a pilgrim! As teachers, we might be able to invite our students on a journey which transcends the structures of the institutions. It is a pilgrimage that requires us to reorganize our symbols, our forms and locations—to change our rituals to support this new approach to learning. For as McLaren (1986) announces, "it is the ritual that carries the pilgrims through the ambiguity and risk of a world of symbol and myth" (p. 237). Such a journey through school, fraught with risk, ambiguity, anticipation, wonder, awe and imagination, is a journey worth taking. Egan (1992) believes that these elements of a journey make for good curriculum. I believe that they also make for good ritual.

Ritual and Classroom Narrative

Egan (1992) observes that between the ages of eight and fifteen, children seem to be their most receptive to the ideas and images that fire the imagination; children are developing their sense of wonder, awe and romance. He suggests that narrative is one of the more profound ways of teaching children. I have come to know it as a location for ritual. He writes:

> Whenever our emotions are involved, so too is a narrative, a story or fragment, that sets the context and the meaning. The role of the story is fundamental to our sense-making, and, in education where sense-making is of primary concern, it is still largely neglected. "Story" does

not necessarily imply a fictional narrative; rather it involves the narrative shape of any content." (p. 70)

Rituals are narrative. They are the symbolic, metaphoric snapshots of relationships and hold within them the same wisdom, intelligence, emotions and prophesies that stories contain. They can be stories and are stories themselves. Teachers and students can use narrative to shape the curriculum. They can be the means for gathering, organizing, recording, remembering and celebrating information. Classroom historians can record the collective history of the classroom community, individuals can record their own unfolding histories and fit this form, this knowledge, these stories into the discipline of curriculum theory and pedagogical beliefs. Tepper (1991) certainly did this with both the introspective writing she made special time for and the classroom, *Na Mo'olelo o Ko Makou 'Ohana, the Stories of Our Families.*

Using narrative helps to make our lives and the lives of the people we study more meaningful. This means we will have to teach within a context that allows students to interpret knowledge in human terms—their terms—thinking about the needs, hopes and fears of the people they are studying. This more personal treatment of content—recognizing people and their relationships as the source, the origins of our texts—demands that we attend to school and pedagogy in a new way.

Carollyne Sinclair (1994) recalls Vivian Gussin Paley's suggestion "that to make sense or meaning in the classroom, teachers must spend more time watching children and listening to what they say" (Paley as cited in Sinclaire. p. 21). Elly Tepper asked herself, "What does it mean to be Hawaiian?" Her answers came from both watching and listening to the children. Her curriculum emerged from what she saw and heard. We might then ask the

question, "What does it mean to be these children?" and we might have the children ask the question, "What does it mean to be poor, to be an explorer, or an ancient Greek?" And "What does it mean to be this child in this story?" As we explore these questions, students and teacher together, we are constructing new stories, theirs and ours. We will come to know the explorer in our own way, through the language of the classroom. We will come to understand his or her sacred objects; even use them to demonstrate our new insights. We will understand her relationships and interpret them through our own. We will look for her locations for meaning and we will bring to it our lived experiences, our prior knowledge. Our comprehension will become more complex. Our investigation of this explorer becomes both personal and professional. We find we, as students and teachers, are doing real work. What we learn about them will announce itself in our personal stories, and what we learn about ourselves will announce itself in our interpretations of her to our classmates as we retell her story in our rituals.

Ritual and Classroom Experience

Ritual becomes our center of gravity and the language used to express the significant, the meaningful, the intuitive and the understood in the classroom community. It becomes one of the focuses for learning when researching others' lives. It becomes our means of expression. Ritual can be the place where important information is shared, where conflicts are resolved, and where meaning is made and remembered.

As a gravitational force, it might be understood as the reflective or perspicuous gathering at the close of each day where a sacred thought or bit of knowledge is shouted or shared. It might be the weekly family circle or the "Shared Knowledge Party" at the completion of each unit, or it might be the

"Classroom Big Book of Histories" where all the community lore, events and myths are recorded for posterity. Tepper (1991) describes this ritual as a centering force when she writes,

> At the "publication party," during which we celebrate and honour ourselves and our families, each author gives a reading and is sincerely applauded and congratulated. Each time I have looked around the circle of authors at this event, I see that I have written nothing but the truth in my Preface to the book: "Through these children the wisdom and strength of their ancestors is perpetuated. They have listened with respect, learned with love and shared with joy." (p. 18)

All of these activities, like Elly's publication party, give the classroom form and location for transformational knowledge to become more rooted in the life of the community. And when we come to describe these experiences we use a language that is different from the formal language of school.

Ritual language is not unlike the distinction Ursula Le Guin (1989) makes between "father tongue" and "mother tongue." Father tongue, she suggests, is more formal, louder. It is used to lecture and for public discourse. It is the language of politicians "the language of power—social power" (p. 147). The power of mother tongue:

> is not in dividing but in binding, not in distancing but uniting. It is written, but not by scribes and secretaries for posterity; it flies from the mouth on the breath that is our life and is gone and yet returning, repeated, the same again always, everywhere, and we all know it by heart ...
>
> It is a language always on the verge of silence and often on the verge of song. It is the language that stories are told in. It is the language spoken by all children and most women ... for we learn it from our

mothers and speak it to our kids. (p. 150)

Mother tongue is not a summation, the final word on a subject, it is not a series of baseball scores nor the right way to do something. It is the language of wonder and awe, romance and wisdom, it is the way we talk about stones and moonlight and it is all the truth held in those few words. It is the gaps and spaces we leave in our day for children to think, and it is the language of the body.

Every body carries a history. In our tissues and bone are the memories of the symbols and gestures, the stories and songs of our lived experience. We are the location for knowing ourselves in the world.

Our bodies, and the bodies of our students, are imprinted with all our personal knowledge: how a worm crawls; what to do when dad is angry; the best way to cook noodles. When this knowledge is brought to bear on the activities in the classroom, it explains the behaviours, attitudes, and meanings that are felt rather than articulated, and it informs new knowledge based on previous experiences. If our bodies are the keepers of all our domestic knowing, then all of us—muscle and skin and hair—must be considered when curriculum is revealed. As practitioners of ritual, we ought to view learning as embodied action, and as practitioners of teaching we need to look for strategies that allow us to do this within the framework of a ritual pedagogy. In addition to our resource books listing role play, readers theatre, tableaus, geste, montage, and play building as structured ways for children to explore areas of the classroom curriculum, students will invent a language of the body to express what is being felt, figured out and understood. Ritual is performative. Narrative is performative. Children easily recognize one within the other and can enter into a place of transformational expression and comprehension. As Salvio (1996) observed in her students: "The power of

insight is afforded to the reader who takes her own immediate physical involvement as a point of departure for understanding" (p. 6).

Elly Tepper used dance, song and kenesthetics to mediate between the bodies knowing and the minds understanding. She wove it into classroom rituals, honoured it as part of the curriculum, and celebrated its rightful place in the process of learning at the end of the year during *Ho'ike.* Encouraging children to express their understanding in the language of the body allows them to create physical symbols of what they have learned about this character or that subject while interacting with the memories they have already stored. In these gestures they learn to scribe upon their skin new information while valuing the knowledge they bring with them from home.

Ritual as Personal Knowledge

Home, and the daily rituals that we experienced as children prior to attending school, are rich with practical, intuitive knowledge. This knowledge is rooted in the family's code of values, encoded and expressed in our domestic rituals and routines. All this we learned in the "mother tongue," and this is the knowledge that children bring to school waiting to have it recognized, validated and put to use. Grumet (1991) argues that school ought to be the mediator between the workplace and home:

> The task that lies before us is to provide a language that resymbolizes the knowledges that we have generated through the specific rituals of our domesticity so that it can inform the processes of curriculum development, negotiation and teaching. (p. 87)

If school is the mediator then we must constantly be looking for the locations where children feel reinforced as learners and teachers, and providers and seekers of information. As Bateson (1994) explains:

> If teachers were to approach their classes with an appreciation of how much their pupils already knew, helping to bring the structure of that informal knowledge into consciousness, students would have the feeling of being on familiar ground, already knowing much about how to know, how knowledge is organized and integrated. (p. 205)

Sylvia Ashton Warner (1963) asked, "What does it mean to be Maori?" Elly Tepper (1991) asked, "What does it mean to be Hawaiian?" Both teachers shaped a curriculum that recognized, utilized and ritualized the cultural heritage of their students. Both drew on these cultures to address the children's interior life as well as their academic life. Both created classrooms that were natural extensions of "home." We need to find our own questions to ask. Questions that will unlock the domestic knowledge of our children and free us to embrace the answers when we hear them; we will need to listen very carefully because they may be whispered.

Ritual offers a framework. Attention to and engagement with sacred objects, gesture, form, and location give opportunity for transformational experiences, for meaning to be made. Within this one notion of ritual is a prism of possibilities refracted in as many new patterns of light as children have imagination to conceive and teachers have time to watch, listen and plan.

What is the lesson?

Elly Tepper (1991) writes:

> This is now my belief: In our classroom, we can all do Real Work—work with mutual purpose, work full of mystery and power, work in our mutual language, work through which we are each, individually and collectively, empowered and transformed into our greatest Selves.

(p. 20)

And why not? Why not a classroom where teacher and students are caught sitting in a solemn circle? Why not a place where the sound of drums mixes with the sounds of phonics. Why not a place where lessons are learned by chanting or stories? Why not a place where the wisdom of the cultures represented in that room become the seams, the creases, the cross-stitching of the community making a fabric with its own name spoken in the language of the children? Why not a classroom brimming with stories, revealing big and small lessons that teach us how we want to be? Why not a location where real work occurs; where work is named and honoured? Why not a room that has symbols and sayings, mystery, and music? And why not a classroom where all of us work toward a great celebration; a coming together of music and dance, art and stories, a sharing of recollections, facts and wisdom? Why not a classroom that is, as McLaren (1986) suggests, " a stronghold for purposeful and life-giving symbols" (p. 256).

Carollyne Sinclaire (1994) writes:

> I didn't understand then the function of ceremonies and celebrations in school as 'indispensable dimensions of human living without which life cannot be complete' (Bollnow, 1989, p. 66). I would come to recognize ceremonies and celebrations as a necessary part of education with a special purpose in schools. (p. 137)

What have I come to recognize? What is my lesson, I wonder? I believe that I too can have a parachute and it will be our gathering place. I believe that if I listen and watch my students carefully I will see the possibilities of cultures on a journey, all come together to sit in a ragged circle carrying boxes and baskets, books and jars filled with sacred things to share about lessons that have been learned. To this collecting place we will bring

the stones from the bend in the South Saskatchewan River, a song sung at camp, the name tag of a classmate moved on, the novel, *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* (1976), a journal filled with stories to tell, a dance to teach, a shopping list and a math test marked one hundred percent. Under this canopy we will tell the story of how we came to be this class. Our history will unfold before us and we will see it in the odd bits and pieces that identify us. The story will be interrupted by demonstrations, lessons learned from an Indian grandma or Vietnamese uncle who remembers. We will sing "The Rain Song" because someone found the right space for it in our ceremony. A fight will be recalled, acted out and resolved and the children will be appropriately respectful when the lessons are being shared by the two who were hurt and then found a path back to the gathering place. I believe that we will collect ourselves, our treasures and insights and we will gather them together and remember how we came to be this class, and the children will be proud of their creased and much read research project on Facts and Figures about B.C. Ferries. I believe that knowledge will be the foundation of our gathering, and music, movement, stories, and artifacts will be the hands that hold this knowledge. I believe that children need old ways to learn new things and teachers need new ways to interpret old things. Classroom rituals become the dream-catchers and we, teachers and students, become the weavers.

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