

**CONVERSATION AND COMMUNITY:  
SHAPING MEANINGFUL PRACTICE AS STUDENTS  
AND TEACHER ENGAGE IN INTERTEXTUAL EXPERIENCES**

by

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
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of  
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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis I examine the reading of books in schools and the multiple factors which facilitate student engagement in intertextual experiences; where a growing sense of self is recognized as intertwined in the complexity of human/world relations. The research question explored within this study is: What are the conditions in a classroom and school community which contribute to students engaging in intertextual experiences? The research was conducted and data gathered within the school community where I teach. The thesis, then, is a theorized account of my own teaching practice.

I begin by revealing some of my experiences in the journey to this stage of my life. I explore my processes in reading texts and their interconnection with personal experiences.

In order for students to gain a sense of membership both within the classroom and, the world, conditions must be created which facilitate students' moving toward full participant status. I contend that it is critical for students to view themselves as an integral part of a larger system. Implicit in this notion is the necessity of knowing 'self' before one can reach out and embrace individuals from other cultures. I analyze varying conditions which may enable children to come to recognize that a society composed of many traditions and cultures can be a school of life. Whenever conditions are created for children to develop as

critical thinkers we need to recognize the implications of the changing relationships between children and their parents. I explore some options, for the inclusion of parents in the community of readers and what impact such involvement may have on the changing set of relations.

Additionally, I have come to more fully appreciate the value of on-going conversation within the school community as a vehicle for shaping a meaningful practice which establishes the conditions for students to engage in intertextual experiences. Not only have I learned to savour the vertigo of making shift and improvising along the way in the writing of this thesis, my study has also served to have implications on my future practice.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated

to the memory of my mother with the realization that I am only beginning to resymbolize, for reflection and translation to other settings, the practical knowledge she modelled; to experience re-cognition and recognize the potential for reconfiguring the world.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the students and staff, past and present, who participated and shared so many of their thoughts and memories which were so central to this work. I am also grateful for the many impromptu conversations which served to not only repeatedly remind me of how connected all aspects of school and lived experience are, but also served to plant the seeds for new ideas and interpretations.

Thanks to Dennis Sumara for the shared experience of working with him in my classroom for an extended period as we simultaneously planned and gathered data, for suggesting many excellent books and articles, and for the helpful and encouraging feedback offered.

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I appreciate very much the friendship and support of Fiona Morrison who took the time to read, challenge, offer ideas, and encourage my writing on an ongoing basis throughout the writing of this thesis.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Setting the Stage

#### Introduction

*What a dangerous activity reading is; teaching is.  
All this plastering on of foreign stuff. Why  
plaster on at all when there's so much inside  
already?*

(Ashton-Warner, 1986, p. 14)

This study did not follow the usual practice of doing graduate work, gathering data, and then reading and writing about it. It was quite the opposite. As I began my first graduate course in reading I suddenly found myself immersed in a frenzy of data gathering activities while working with a university researcher, not being quite sure of how, or if, a thesis would evolve out of the experience. I had an intuitive sense, though, that immersion in this literary experience was good both for me and for my class of ten and eleven year old students. As a part of the process my students and I came to know what living with ambiguity means. What I was to later write about was lived experience.

Before exploring the research orientation, methodologies, and my chapter topics, I think it is important to reveal something of my personal trek and the transformations involved in the process of inquiry. In particular, I will examine several of the experiences which provided stepping stones leading to my immersion in the

study. David Smith (1991) suggests that in research of a phenomenological and hermeneutic nature it is critical to report on the dialogical journey, the personal transformations experienced by the researcher. He adds that it is imperative that researchers be prepared to deepen self-understanding in the course of research. Smith believes this kind of research also to be profoundly ethical, particularly when one considers the conversational quality of hermeneutic truth (p.198). Thomas Merton (1961) supports this view, stating, "If I give you my truth but do not receive your truth in return, then there can be no truth between us" (p. 70).

### **The Integration of All Aspects of Self with Literature**

*Non fatuum huc persecutus ignem*--It is no will-o-the-wisp that I have followed here.

(Maxwell, 1960, p.3)

As I began writing it seemed necessary for me to explore the following question: What brought me to this stage of my life where I am probing deeply within myself to explain why reading and the very process of learning have become so all consuming for me? Could it be purely "will-o-the-wisp?" I think not. However, the question requires some deep reflection of my personal journey and what might be perceived as coincidental meetings that have represented critical turning points in the paths that I have chosen.

I cannot refer to choices and paths taken without thoughts of Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken." Frost writes of being presented with situations in life where we must make choices about the direction we will travel, without benefit of a crystal ball to indicate our likelihood of success. Some paths require the taking of risks more than do others, but offer more opportunity for exhilaration and euphoria reaped from having met new challenges. In making those choices we come to recognize that we can never go back, that each step keeps leading us in new directions, to new relationships or new opportunities. Such has been the case in my own journey.

As I reflect back on incidents, turning points, and the individuals who were there at just the right time to affect those choices, what stands out in my mind were people who had a strong voice, a clear sense of their beliefs and values, a commitment to their goals, and who pursued those goals with enormous determination, energy and passion, regardless of naysayers. As well, I came to recognize that often these individuals wrote in such a manner that their voices came through; they were not hesitant to take risks and reveal themselves through their writing. Instead, they freely acknowledged that who they are is firmly enmeshed in what they do--the two are inseparable. I came to realize that was what this thesis was about for me: a demonstration of my willingness to take the risk of revealing my "self"; to reveal in writing a part of myself that I have previously only shared with carefully chosen friends and colleagues. If this study were to serve any worthwhile purpose then it

was time to move from what Sumara (1993) calls going from the personal to the public ... a move which is "risky, fraught with ambiguity, but deeply satisfying" ( p. 173). As I look back to critical incidents that ultimately resulted in this study, moving from the personal to the public is what I seek to do.

A thread that runs through my life, a trait that has been exhibited repeatedly, has been a passion for throwing myself into areas which interest me. My softball playing in youth and early years of adulthood; the years I spent learning to ride and show horses; my total immersion in the study of kinesiology and my passion for understanding the human body and becoming as fit as I could be, are all examples of this. And yet through all of these experiences, periods of my life, and people I had met along the way, nothing had moved me deeply. I had yet to find my niche.

My involvement in kinesiology courses such as Human Physiology, Exercise Management and Nutrition provided me with opportunities to participate in both Physical Education classes and in a grade one class, courtesy of several key players in my life. These experiences led me to discover what was to become a consuming desire to become a teacher, to become the finest teacher that I could be, and to help to shape the direction of education. One might say that the "two roads diverged" and I would aspire to take "the one less traveled." As time would tell, it did indeed make all the difference.

Early in my teacher education program I had the good fortune to be introduced to Sylvia Ashton-Warner, first

through the video *Sylvia* (1985), followed by her book *Teacher* (1986). These experiences touched me deeply and created an awareness of the need for all of us to form and articulate beliefs about life in general, and also to be prepared to act upon them--to stand for something--whatever the cost might be. Through my repeated "visits" to *Teacher* I found myself scribbling all over the margins, adding sticky papers, underlining wise passages, and forming a relationship with the author, developing a sense that I knew her personally. Throughout my teaching career Ashton-Warner has continually re-surfaced, in ways that I could not have predicted at first reading. What was it about Ashton-Warner's writing that had such a profound effect on my life, and led me to her other works?

*Teacher* is a text preoccupied with questions about being, one that created the conditions for me to think deeply about such questions and to engage in conversations with others that helped us to understand ourselves and each other. Ashton-Warner suggests that in learning to read children need to first work with their own resources, to embrace and understand their own world before they are inundated with reams of foreign material that hold no meaning for them yet. Reading must become a part of the child if it is to become a life long passion.

Through her work with Maori children, Ashton-Warner (1986) observed how destructive behaviour could be replaced with creative endeavors, work which taps into individual interests and yet requires cooperative construction. She states:

I see the mind of a five-year-old as a volcano with two vents; destructiveness and creativeness. And I see that to the extent that we widen the creative channel, we atrophy the destructive one. And it seems to me that since these words of the key vocabulary are no less than the captions of the dynamic life itself, they course out through the creative channel, making their contribution to the drying up of the destructive vent. From all of which I am constrained to see it as creative reading and to count it among the arts. (p. 33)

In the picture book, *Knots on a Counting Rope* (Martin, 1987), the grandfather ties another knot in his counting rope as he retells stories to his grandson. The counting rope is a metaphor for the passage of time, and the the boy's emerging confidence in facing life's challenges. It is clear to me that this "meeting" with Sylvia, the forming of a deep relationship represented a "knot" in my life at a point where confidence, courage and new understanding was required.

### **Significant Experiences**

As I began my teaching career, I took with me vivid memories of many positive and rich experiences from my teacher education experience. And then there were the education courses which I immersed in immediately after completing my program. I was introduced to teaching practices that were dramatically changed from my previous



educational experiences. These prior experiences had been, more often than not, unengaging, right-answer oriented, and teacher-directed learning situations. It was life-altering for me, during my teacher education program, to be introduced to interactive, cooperative learning experiences which engaged body, mind and spirit in a wide range of curricular areas. I discovered the role the teacher has, through personal involvement, in creating conditions for meaningful, engaged learning in the classroom. My two faculty associates, Jean Way and Lin Langley, provided the necessary leadership, a passion for education, and their support--all of which proved transformational for me at a critical time in my new career. Chris Borody, my school associate, supported me and trusted me to create meaningful experiences in her classroom. For example, I had students make personal meaning in literary experiences rather than simply responding to comprehension questions, and integrated language arts, social studies, and science where possible so students could grasp the interconnectedness of curricular areas and their world. All of the previously mentioned individuals share the second knot on the counting rope.

Soon after I had the good fortune of taking two courses offered by Dr. Selma Wasserman, a professor at Simon Fraser University. The courses were: "Critical Incidents in Teaching--The Teacher as Decision Maker", and "Teaching for Thinking", and have a lingering impact on all aspects of my life. I learned that not only is it critical to create situations which enable students to develop their thinking skills in a meaningful context, and also that every decision

we make as teachers impacts upon those students in some way. It is imperative, then, to be clear on the rationale for every decision, to know why we are doing what we are doing. Above all, I learned the importance of choosing one's battles carefully and standing up for one's beliefs, and to act on those beliefs. Another knot on the counting rope.

Throughout my early years of teaching I also began what was to become a love affair with books, most notably children's literature. It might seem curious that this latest passion should begin at a stage in my life when most would likely view it as merely necessary reading in order to prepare to teach them to an unsuspecting class. Again, as I completed my degree, I had the good fortune of working with Mary Kooy, a professor at the university who introduced me to some excellent literature and who also opened my eyes to the world of reader-response theory, something that I have no recollection of experiencing in all of my previous years of schooling. The license to interact with the text and create my own meaning, based on previous experiences, was enormously freeing for me. I began to seek out more and more texts and explore various genres, heightening my awareness of the quality of writing available and the sophistication of the varied topics within those texts. My personal collection now includes countless books of my favorite genre, historical fiction, as well as picture books, poetry, adventure, biographies and autobiographies, to name a few. As a result of this acquaintance my teaching practice has continued to evolve. I was also fortunate in being able to introduce Mary Kooy to the staff at my school at that time. She engaged us

in a series of workshops which had the effect of altering the reading programs of some of the teachers.

In order to provide my students with rich literary experiences I continued to seek out new, quality, meaningful literature. In reflecting on how my appetite for books was stimulated and another passion awakened, I must acknowledge the modelling of Mary Kooy: her enthusiasm in sharing books; valuing of a personal response rather than a focus on the one correct response; the creation of a safe, open environment in which risks could be taken and rich experiences could unfold. Clearly, another knot on the rope.

It was probably not just by chance nor "will-o-the-wisp" that I arrived at the school where I presently teach. But how could I know some three years ago, when I applied to become a part of a unique experience, this "Demonstration School," all that was to await me. The title "Otter Demonstration School" was coined by district management personnel in an effort to distinguish this newly formed concept of a school from others in the district.

There was a perceived need for a school where staff would commit to staying abreast of new Ministry of Education directives in curriculum development, working with district personnel in order to become better informed, and working towards becoming proficient in the use of new materials and programs. A willingness to demonstrate use of new materials and new innovations to parents of the community and other teachers was also among the criteria for participation in this new concept.

Another mandate of the school included staff commitment

to teacher education. All teachers applying to teach at the school needed to agree to become involved in the teacher education program with the university on an on-going basis. The staff which was then assembled made a commitment to those criteria and anticipated many exciting and challenging experiences and opportunities.

Working with many student teachers who entered the program having a wide range of interests, backgrounds and levels of commitment to the profession has contributed moments of euphoria as well as some difficult decision-making. The constant process of reflecting on and exploring my own beliefs about teaching practice, precipitated by such experiences, has enabled me to articulate my beliefs more clearly, as well as serving to ensure that I continue to grow on a professional and personal level.

One advantage for staff members at Otter has been involvement in new initiatives and studies being conducted by various university researchers who were involved with the school early in its conception. Such was my good fortune; this study had its inception from one such experience.

Surely it was no coincidence that I had followed to this school, a place where we forged ahead with new resolve and insights--the most recent "knot" on my life's rope.

### **Mosaic Connections**

Through being immersed in this study, I came to realize that this inquiry truly represents a mosaic of my life. Books that I read are often somehow inter-connected to one

another, whether read for the purpose of my study or for other reasons. As I read children's literature, invariably a phrase, sentence, or passage leaps from the pages into my collecting journal. Every meaningful conversation provides for further reflection. Other resources, such as movies and documentaries, have provided invaluable sources of thought-provoking issues. Without doubt, this study has permeated all aspects of my life and informed my classroom practice. In her thesis (1995) on *Teaching and Writing in Schools* Rebecca Luce-Kapler shares similar experiences. She writes:

Not only did the questions for my research change and broaden, but as I worked I realized how much of my life became threaded through this research. Books I read, not specifically for the study, connected in surprising ways. Movies I attended, conversations I had, and decisions I made opened important understandings for me. I found that my personal work with portfolios began to inform the questions I took to the students and the kinds of observations I made. In turn, the experiences in the classroom, affected how I viewed my own portfolio-making.... There were multiple connections being formed and reformed as the study progressed, and I developed a new appreciation for how intricately we are joined through our lives to other people and the world (p.76).

Are these not the kinds of connections we would wish our students to learn to make? To see incidents and experiences,

not in isolation, but rather, as part of a meaningful, ever-evolving whole? I will discuss more about this concept later.

### **Having Choice and Voice**

I have also become aware of my own process of reading and sharing favored texts. As a voracious reader of childrens' literature, newspapers, and professional literature, I became more aware of the approaches I have employed to discern meaning from challenging text during the course of this study. The nature of the text or purpose for my reading determines the strategy or approach I take. I find it both necessary and helpful to re-read passages slowly, using context cues to make meaning. Circling words that I am unsure of, and later referring to a dictionary is another strategy I use. My books are littered with "sticky papers" marking pages where passages are either underlined or starred, the margins invaded with personal responses. I am reluctant to borrow books because I find I am severely restricted in my freedom to choose the suitable means of response. At times, though, I do use a response journal and record particular quotes that I wish to refer to in other contexts. My awareness of the strategies I use in making meaning piqued a curiosity about how students would respond if given an opportunity to choose their method(s) of response when reading a text in a classroom context.

I have become very attached to and protective of some books which I treasure. While I am aware that I love to

"talk books," it is also a disappointment when books or stories I have recommended, loaned out, or read aloud to classes are dismissed lightly. Dennis Sumara (1994) likens this experience to a personal slight--a rejection not only of the text but also of our taste in books. He suggests that the desire to share favored texts with our students, close friends, or colleagues, and subject ourselves to the risk of rejection is similar to our caring for valued relationships and the desire to forge connections between these varied relationships. In such situations we feel apprehension that the interconnection will not be realized as desired, that our taste in relationships will be rejected. However, in my experiences of combining valued books with friendships, the euphoria of positive sharings usually overrides the fear of rejection, and I take the risk. Ironically, shortly after having written the above passage I was to be tested on that very topic. On September 23, 1996 I made this entry in my commonplace book (a term which I will define later):

In reflecting back on the weekend it now seems no coincidence that events unfolded as they did. It seems rather ironic that I had had a conversation with my travelling companion on our way to a work related weekend retreat. We talked about the relationship between choosing to share cherished, valued literature with others and forging connections between valued friends. Both, we agreed, involved much risk of rejection.

I was conscious of having made the decision to

share a video which I viewed as a work of art, clearly something close to my heart. The video had implications for education although some might see them as somewhat abstract. I had, however, attempted to 'read the climate' among the participants and the potential for a rich experience and then made the decision to share.

Needless to say, the banter, one-line witticisms, uproarious laughter, and entries and exits, interspersed throughout the movie utterly destroyed any possibility of a reflective, thought-provoking, building experience to follow, at least from my perspective.

As I sat there I was most clearly aware of my strong emotional response to what was happening, even though I had thought that I was prepared. I simply wanted to flee, to find some river bank upon which I could lick my wounds. And yet I was also processing the experience, so shocked was I that the feelings of personal rejection were so strong, aware that most in the room were not even conscious, could not be conscious, of my personal attachment and subsequent vulnerability. Naturally, my thoughts returned to the conversation that preceded.

In a conversation with a friend I came to realize that an experience such as sharing a video had the potential to render the person sharing even more vulnerable than sharing a



book because of the location of the experience. The one who shares is located among those reviewing, critiquing, and as in this case, in my perception, rejecting my choice. In sharing a book, a less "public" experience, such is not necessarily the case and thus I am somewhat less vulnerable. As well, in a "viewing" situation one does not have the liberty to "hand pick" one's viewing companions according to taste, personality, and current state of mind, but rather, assesses the potential response of the group as a whole.

I became aware that my experience with the film and the subsequent conversation about it suggested an atmosphere of intimacy as well as an inward look at self--all taking place in public. Clearly, not all spectators are comfortable with such settings and the behaviors I had noted might suggest such discomfort. I wondered then about the connections this experience had with the classroom....

### **The Interconnectedness of Research Orientation and Methodology**

I have explored how much of my growth to the point of beginning this study has been intertwined with literature, the impact that literature has had on my life, and the key players, processes and approaches I employ to facilitate meaningful intertextual experiences. I will address implications of these more specifically in subsequent chapters. But now I will speak to the methodologies employed, my research orientation, the process of writing the thesis and the shaping of the chapters. All of these

unfolded at once and overlapped rather than occurring in a linear manner.

The study began when Dennis Sumara, a Simon Fraser University researcher, approached our school with a proposal to engage the staff in a number of literary experiences, one of which was to be a shared reading of the science fiction novel *The Giver* by Lois Lowry (1993). A teacher reading group was formed, with teachers taking copies of the novel home to read. The only direction given was that three or four passages were to be marked for potential discussion at the next meeting.

When we next assembled a lively conversation ensued about many of the topics addressed in the novel, including issues of racism, censorship, sexuality, and euthanasia. In particular I recall one participant (who was Caucasian) sharing his wife's (who is non-Caucasian) perception of the prevalence of racism in our society. While he believed that incidents of racism were few to non-existent she was adamant that she herself had on repeated occasions been the recipient of racist remarks. Regardless of her first hand experiences and perceptions, he was insistent that such was not the case. He went on to suggest that there were no racist attitudes held among those in our school community and cited the perceived comfort level of our very small English as a Second Language (ESL) population. I was to discover, as the study unfolded, that his notions were not shared, at least by one member of our class who was also enrolled in ESL sessions. I discuss her response further in a later chapter.

I further recall how I drew a parallel between the

pursuit of conformity, the acceptance of only one culture, described in *The Giver* and the oppressive environment of the Indian Residential Schools which attempted to eradicate First Nations cultures. Few other staff members had recognized the similarities between the two settings and responded more strongly to issues of sexuality and euthanasia. I realized that because of my First Nations origins I had reacted to the notion of a systematic elimination of cultural differences much more strongly than the others. They zeroed in on issues that touched them in some way.

Questions arose as to the suitability of the book for classroom use that year given its potentially controversial nature. We decided to invite parents in the school community to read *The Giver* as well, to join us in further discussion.

Once the parents and teachers tested the waters and a comfort level was achieved, we immersed in an in-depth, open discussion of the novel. I remember being surprised at the issues the parents raised in their discussion of the book. Issues they talked about included: the systematic eradication of those who were deemed to have committed serious errors of judgment, elimination of differences in the pursuit of sameness in the community in which the novel was set (although they focussed more on such characteristics as eye colour and physical abnormalities than on issues such as multiculturalism), and euthanization of the elderly. No one brought up the subject of the elimination of sexual desire, or the censorship of reading material as an area of concern. As we concluded the session the parents expressed, overwhelmingly, a desire for their children to read *The*

*Giver*, if not in the classroom, then at home. As many of the parent participants had students in my class and everyone determined that it would be appropriate reading for that age level (ten and eleven year olds) we decided to proceed. Most importantly, my appetite had been whetted. I was most curious about the response of the students in my class to the novel in general, and further, what issues among those which stood out for me, or perhaps hadn't even thought of, would most pique the interests of the students.

Other parents were informed of the success of the shared session via the school newsletter and were also invited to read the novel, if they so desired. I address more fully, in a later chapter, the various points of view the parents had, and their experiences in sharing a common book with their children. However, I suspect that one reason for their endorsement of this novel was the recognition that it is rare to encounter so many sensitive, yet relevant, issues within one novel. Some may have welcomed having us, as teachers, deal with these issues rather than having to do so themselves. Regardless, given the tension created in the community with the inception of the Demonstration School concept and a change in staff, this shared reading experience seemed to represent a turning point in parent/staff relations.

At this point I welcomed Dennis into my class and we began to plan together an integrated language arts unit around *The Giver*, employing a variety of methods and data gathering techniques. I was as yet unclear as to how this experience would eventually form the basis of my thesis and I

was unaware that I would inquire so deeply into my own teaching practice. While I believe I had always embraced the notion of immersing my students in meaningful literary experiences and had engaged Mary Kooy, another Simon Fraser University researcher, in several reader response sessions at my previous school, I did not as yet have a language to express the significance of these experiences for my students and myself. It was only through immersion in the study, rather than at a specific moment, that I realized that this study would become the nucleus of my thesis.

In order for the students to have an opportunity to show in some tangible way their relation to the text, research funds were used to purchase personal copies of the novel for each student. The students were then invited to record their own responses to the novel in any way that was comfortable to them, whether it be writing directly into the the margins of the text, in the blank spaces at the end of chapters, on Post-It™ notes attached next to various passages, or in response journals. Dennis shared how one of the characters in Michael Ondaatje's (1992) novel *The English Patient* used his copy of Herodotus' *The Histories* in such a manner. As the English patient's charred body lay silent and unmoving in a bed, the other characters came to know him by reading his copy of *The Histories* aloud, along with the layered notes and entries he had added to this book through the years. The English patient's entries became intertwined with the text such that, in a sense, he co-authored the text, a text that was fluid and changing with every entry and interpretation.

Dennis related his practice of reading Ondaatje's novel

with a pencil in hand so that he could ask himself questions, talk back to the characters and keep track of his thinking without ever having to leave the text. I, in turn, shared my well worn copy of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *Teacher* with the highlighted passages, underlined sections, writing in the margins and stickies protruding from each side. In this way the notion of a commonplace book as a location for establishing a relationship with a text in a material way was introduced. While I have many books which I have used in such a "collecting place" manner, I had not previously attached a name to it. The use of a commonplace book then, was an effective means of having students begin to understand that each time one goes back and re-reads passages, or even thinks about them, interpretations change. As such, the commonplace location is in constant evolution.

As we had expected, most of the students jumped in with gusto, circling unfamiliar vocabulary terms, underlining favored passages, and writing responses. (See as evidence, samples in Appendix A.) A few students chose the more conventional form of writing only in response journals, as they were uncomfortable doing otherwise.

Dennis and I discussed the form for the sharing of the text having already agreed that reading aloud would be central to the experience. Would we read the entire text aloud? Would the two of us take turns reading aloud, alternating at the end of a chapter or somewhere within? Would we stop to talk about the story with the students as we went and provide time for students to make entries, or wait until the conclusion of a chapter before sharing? In the end

we used a variety of these approaches depending on our on-going observations, subsequent discussions, and student input. Now, in looking back, I am aware of just how inextricably linked is the relationship between research and teaching. We did not come to the class with a carefully laid out unit that we were determined to teach from beginning to end. Rather, we were prepared to improvise along the way, making changes as needed, being sure to hear the voices of all participants. For me, there was a philosophical fit between what we were doing in the classroom and my research, although at the time I did not have a name for the research orientation I was immersed in.

Throughout the entire first oral reading of the novel the sessions were videotaped as students listened, made written entries and contributed to discussion. On the occasion where students had read a chapter silently on their own and then discussed it in small groups, we audiotaped each of those sessions. During the reading of other related texts or experiences, which I will elaborate on in later chapters, I also audiotaped the students' discussions. Since we read the book aloud twice, many of the second reading sessions were also videotaped. Always there were conversations, primarily among Dennis, Linda Hof, our video technician, and me to discuss what had occurred and to shape new direction. Linda had many insights and ideas to offer as a result of both having read the novel and her proximity to students through the use of both video and audio techniques and equipment. From her perspective she could observe reactions to comments and passages without being concerned about asking

questions or giving instructions. I recorded key points from conversations and any further reflections, insights, or ideas I might have later in what was to become my new commonplace book, an interpretive location for coming to more fully understand what I would later write about. As well, I often recorded reflections on audiotape after class or as I drove home.

When the students had completed the study which also included writing essays, Dennis and I conducted focus group interviews which were also videotaped--first with groups of students (four groups including a total of fourteen students), and then with one group of three parents who had participated and were available.

Later, as I viewed the tapes, I transcribed passages representing a specific focus in my commonplace book. For example, on one occasion I noted only the questions that Dennis or I asked, and on a subsequent viewing of the same focus group interview, I wrote about students' body language, tone and manner. With one particular focus group I found their comments so rich and their interactions so open and comfortable that I was repeatedly drawn back to it for further viewings. Each time I observed details that I had missed previously. Sometimes the data overlapped with what I had transcribed previously in my commonplace book, much like life experiences tend to overlap with one another. I began to realize that, while I had boxes of videotape including both in-class sessions and focus group interviews as well as volumes of other data, this particular tape would provide much of the supporting data for my writing. I viewed many of



the other tapes but only transcribed those passages that in some way related to the reading I was doing simultaneously.

As I read other texts and attempted to interpret the data, I would repeatedly revisit my notes and I found that each time I was interpreting them in different ways in light of new readings and experiences. At one point I was surprised to find that I had used the same passages and interpreted them quite differently in two different chapters! Each time I read my notes I added comments in the margins or entered Post-It™ notes, a continual layering on of interpretations.

As I immersed in further course work, I found myself beginning to use my notebook in quite a different way. I was making entries, reflecting on various incidents and experiences which seemed not directly connected to this study. Notes I wrote to people which reflected new insights or connections I drafted in my book so that I would have a copy. Notes I received and photographs were also tucked in. In fact, I was rarely seen without my blue notebook because I never knew when an incident would occur that I would want to record, or when I might recognize a quote that I would later want to reflect on. One such example is the journal entry shared earlier: my response to an incident at a staff retreat.

I was becoming increasingly aware of just how interconnected all aspects of my life were; my role of teacher was not isolated from that of researcher, wife, mother or friend. As a result, many entries addressing these facets of my life have found their way into my writing.

Through the process of reading the theses of Fiona Morrison (1995) and Rebecca Luce-Kapler (1995), anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson's book *Peripheral Visions* (1994) and articles by Madeleine Grumet (1991, 1995) and Dennis Sumara (1994, 1996b). I came to recognize a style of writing that I wished to emulate. These researchers were able to hold my attention and I, the reader, turned the page and kept on turning to the end; an act that is critical to qualitative work, for meaning is in the reading, not in the scanning (Tuchman, 1989 and Richardson, 1994). As researchers, these individuals were set squarely in the midst of the work they were engaged in, they were not peripheral observers. Laurel Richardson supports this type of research when she states, "The researcher is fully present in her or his work, more honest, more engaged, the writing serves to strengthen the community of qualitative researchers and the individual voices within it" (1994, p. 516).

Reading and re-reading favorite books and watching favorite movies helped me to discern the themes that were emerging and determine chapter topics. However, as I began writing and continued to read and engage in new experiences, the boundaries of each chapter continued to shift and some topics were eventually replaced. This is typical of qualitative research that is both phenomenological and hermeneutic in its orientation, for our understanding and interpretation of events is inevitably altered with each new experience (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

My process in reading each book or journal article was to underline, star, or respond to passages that I wished to

revisit. I would then enter all significant passages, along with my responses to them, on my computer and run hard copies. The next step was to code the entries according to the chapter or sub-topic for which I thought it had relevance. Consequently, I have a vast stack of such notes which I have re-read and responded to many times, and again, I have found that many passages might fit into any chapter, depending on how I choose to interpret at a given time. I view these notes, as well as my other notebooks, as what Sumara (1996) calls "commonplace locations" for interpretation because of the continual re-visiting and layering on of response and experience. As Sumara suggests, the material presence of the commonplace books serves as an interpretive location each time I re-visit them, or even think about the entries. Through the process of submitting my books and notes to multiple writings and readings I have been able to develop a sense of the complexity of my interpretations and the relationship of the entries to each other. Sumara makes clear that the commonplace location is not the book itself. He states: "The interpretation of the commonplace book, then, is not of the "thing itself" but, rather, of the complex relations that collect because of its material presence "(p. 45).

As I wrote and continued to read, conversed about the topics with friends and colleagues, and went about my daily life, new insights and ideas emerged which resulted in the on-going shifting and collecting of new data, and the re-shaping of the chapters. For instance, conversations and memories prompted me to write narratives which, when I

thought I was nearing the end of my writing, led me to new interviews and the gathering of further data. I was coming to understand the process of writing as a form of inquiry, a method of discovery and analysis, rather than simply a "mopping up" activity (Richardson, 1994). I was finding out about myself, discovering new aspects of my topic, and my relationship to it. Form and content were becoming inseparable.

I have come to recognize not only that I am able to tolerate ambiguity in the pursuit of complexity, I am indeed excited by it, a characteristic that Glesne and Peshkin (1992) suggest is critical for qualitative researchers. They write:

Qualitative researchers must be able to tolerate, and perhaps even to enjoy, ambiguity in their pursuit of complexity. Moreover, they tend to observe what others miss, listen when others talk, and ask questions that others might not think to raise. (p. xii)

I know that my research is qualitative because, as Glesne and Peshkin maintain, "it is supported by the interpretivist paradigm, which portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and everchanging" (p.6). Further, my research was phenomenological because I was gathering data in the forms mentioned earlier interspersed with personal perspectives and recollections of lived experience. It was hermeneutic because, as Denzin and Lincoln (1994) state, this research "stresses how prior understandings and prejudices

shape the interpretive process" (p.1). Further, as Smith (1991) suggests, "Hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it" (p. 201). The researcher immersed in hermeneutic inquiry does not merely treat other people as objects upon which to try out one's methodological repertoire, but rather, is prepared to deepen his or her own self-understanding (Smith, 1991). As the thesis unfolds it will become clearer that as researcher I am immersed in a journey of self-understanding.

I have come to recognize that while this thesis is shaped and intertwined with the voices of the students I have worked with, along with all and sundry participants, it is primarily about teaching practice and what I, as teacher bring to the classroom. It is my energy and passion for literature and teaching which ignites the students and awakens a passion in them; it creates the potential for deep and meaningful relationships to be formed, both intertextually and interpersonally. Without such passion, all of the theoretical readings and personal growth have little meaning.

This inquiry, then, is centered around the novel *The Giver*, which was used as a vehicle at the inception of the study. As well, as an assortment of other related literature which followed. The stories of all of the key players involved, including myself, are also critical, stories from which I was creating new meaning. The pieces of the puzzle that came together in the form of this thesis allowed my initial question--What are the conditions in a classroom and school community which contribute to students, together with

teacher, engaging in intertextual experiences?--to become clear to me. In the following chapters I will attempt to respond to this question.

### **Thesis Overview**

As a result of the process elaborated earlier, I came to recognize the shape of the major themes which were emerging. Exploring conditions which would enable students to move toward a greater degree of autonomy and involvement, from legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1993) to full participation, seemed critical and, therefore, came to form Chapter Two. The term 'peripheral' reverberates throughout the text and will be defined in different ways as the chapters unfold.

The theme of recognizing the self as a part of a larger whole, as part of a constantly adapting and fluid system having all components dependent on one another for existence, shapes Chapter Three.

In creating the conditions for students to develop as original thinkers it is critical that we, as teachers, recognize and understand the impact and implications of the changing relationships between children and their parents. In what ways can we involve parents in the processes which their children are engaged in, to reduce uncertainty and anxiety, and additionally, to recognize parents as part of a richly diverse field of essential actors? Such concepts and questions are addressed in Chapter Four.

Chapter Five explores the value of on-going conversation

and teamwork in developing curriculum, examining conversation as purposeful pedagogy, the notion of returning to participants for further evidence of reflection and growth, and the joy of ensemble membership.

I conclude with a narrative that not only cautions against selective invitations into the community where intertextual experiences are facilitated but also serves to focus on what I believe this study is about. The final chapter will also serve as a directional indicator for "where we go from here," for as I have become aware, hermeneutic inquiry and, indeed, conversations, are not about endpoints, but, rather, are places for new beginnings.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Moving from Legitimate Peripheral Participation to Full Participation in the Elementary Classroom**

*Freire operates on one basic assumption: that man's ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a Subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves toward ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively.*

(Shaul, in Freire, 1993, p. 14)

#### **Learning as a Situated Activity**

From the perspective of many, schooling is often viewed as a process of opening up the mind of the learner and pouring in new material. The teacher's job is to choose appropriate curricular material and dispense it into the minds of the students, while the students' job is to acquire this factual knowledge and display it later for the purpose of evaluation. Paulo Freire (1993) labels this approach the "banking" concept of education and suggests that the role of the student is thus limited to receiving, filing, and storing the deposits made by teachers. Freire makes clear that it is only through invention, re-invention, and continuing inquiry pursued in the world, with the world, and with each other, that knowledge emerges.



Mary Catherine Bateson (1994), in *Peripheral Visions*, states that it is the new task of parents and teachers, rather than passing on hallowed certainties, maintaining the status quo, to instead, "make childhood an open-ended introduction to a process of continual change in which self-observation can become the best of teachers" (p.8). We must teach our children, and indeed model for them, how to live with ambiguity. We must help them to come to understand that learning and living are built on an improvisational base where new steps in the dance of life are learned along the way, that learning occurs through participation.

Berk and Winsler (1995), in their explanation of the theories and work of Vygotsky, view learning as situated activity. They emphasize the "vital connection between the social and the psychological worlds of the child" (p. vii). Vygotsky's work places much importance on adult-child and child-child discourse in cognitive development, thereby elevating the impact of social experience and culturally specific practices on children's development. Lave and Wenger (1991) also support the view that learning is socially constructed and is an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world, not a process that just happens to be located somewhere. They have coined the phrase legitimate peripheral participation to describe the central defining characteristic of learning viewed as situated activity. Lave and Wenger explain:

By this (legitimate peripheral participation) we mean to draw attention to the point that learners

inevitably participate in communities of practitioners and that the mastery of knowledge and skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community. (1991, p.29)

Lave and Wenger use as examples various forms of apprenticeship where newcomers participate in communities of practitioners and gradually gain experience and expertise through growing involvement, ultimately moving toward full participation. They suggest that when peripherality is enabled this provides the conditions for more intensive participation. This, they propose, is an empowering position from which children become legitimate peripheral participants in adult social worlds.

As such notions relate to the classroom, learning becomes less a teacher/learner dyad, but rather, opens the door to a myriad of possibilities for learning, including a diverse range of participants as well as other forms of relationships of participation. Lave and Wenger point out that in order for learners to develop into full participants, conditions must be present that will enable learners to be legitimate peripheral participants on an ongoing basis. Learning occurs through centripetal participation in the curriculum of the community in which one is immersed rather than by replicating the performances of others or by acquiring knowledge transmitted through instruction. How, then, do such notions of situated learning and communities of practice translate into actual classroom practice? The work

of Vivian Gussin Paley (1992) and Kelleen Toohey (1996) provides some explanation.

### **Socially Situated Learning**

In general, the approach has been to help the outsiders develop the characteristics that will make them more acceptable to the insiders. I am suggesting something different: the *group* must change its attitudes and expectations toward those who, for whatever reason, are not yet part of the system.

(Paley, 1992, p. 33)

In her book *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, Vivian Gussin Paley (1992) explores the notion of socially situated learning in a kindergarten classroom. Her study was motivated by a concern about what effect being excluded from play had on young learners. Subsequently, her research became a quest to find out what the response would be to a rule stating "You can't say you can't play." Paley's study is unique in that she not only had kindergarten students participate in exploring all the factors to consider in imposing such a rule, but she also sought the input of students from grades one to five and reported their responses to the kindergarten class before coming to a decision. This is clearly an example of legitimate peripheral participation in the decision making process of a classroom, as all

participants knew clearly that their opinions had validity, and their voices would be heard. Interestingly, the older students saw it as essential that young students (kindergartners and even pre-school children) not develop the habit of rejection and exclusion in order for the rule to work effectively. The grade five students acknowledged that it becomes much more difficult to reverse such behaviors as students enter older grades and habits are ingrained.

Paley weaves a fictional story about loneliness and rejection throughout both her book and her teaching experiences. The story provides a means for the children to speak safely in the third person about feelings and issues which strike close to home while at the same time communicating the connections they are making. However, Paley acknowledges that:

Story is never enough, nor is talk. We must be told, when we are young, what rules to live by. The grownups must tell the children early in life so that myth and morality proclaim the same message while the children are still listening. (1992, p. 110)

The kindergarten students who are told they can't play might be viewed as similar to Lave and Wenger's (1991) outsiders or newcomers, non-participants, with the teacher seeking ways to move the students toward full participation in the classroom. The insiders could be viewed as those students who currently hold the power of deciding who is allowed to play.

Lave and Wenger's notion of a community of practice can be defined as "a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice" (1991, p. 98). In Paley's kindergarten class (the particular community of practice overlapping with other classrooms and, indeed, the world) she believed that students who are told they can't play do not learn as well. Rather, they learned the group's practices and ways of doing things; their beliefs, values and power relations.

Paley stresses that it is not because students are different that they are outsiders, but rather, it is "that they are *treated* as outsiders" (1992, p. 68). She states that it is common to attempt to find ways to help outsiders become more like insiders and therefore more acceptable to insiders, and proposes the notion that the group must change its attitudes and expectations towards those who are not yet part of the group in order to provide the conditions for peripheral participation. Until this happens these students will be largely non-participants.

While Paley's notion might seem somewhat radical and one might question the long term effect of imposed rules such as "You can't say you can't play," her anecdote about one student named Lisa strongly suggests that her approach might have merit. Lisa enjoys powerful insider status in the kindergarten but after involvement in raising issues and examining factors to be considered in imposing the rule (legitimate peripheral participation), Lisa gives evidence of her desire to have the teacher refuse to allow her to be mean

even when she is jealous of playmates or uncomfortable with strangers who have joined the group. She grasps the connection between myth and morality. Because she is able to express her point of view through the protagonist in Paley's story (Magpie) Lisa is less vulnerable in letting it be known that she was experiencing a change of heart; she was safer:

Lisa jumps up, laughing. "Oh, no! Magpie won't ever let her be mean to Annabella. I just know that!" And she runs off to play. (1992, p. 68)

While still very young, Lisa is undoubtedly aware and conscious of the value of not excluding others, and the ultimate costs of doing so. The students in this class and school can be viewed as legitimate peripheral participants in this decision-making experience, with the teacher providing the necessary scaffolding.

Kelleen Toohey (1996) uses the notions of community of practice and legitimate peripheral participation in her ethnographic study of two students in a kindergarten class where half the students were learning English as a second language (ESL). Toohey sees kindergarten students as newcomers in the community of practice known as school. She is interested in studying how ESL students in the kindergarten class come to be participants and what effect their presence has on other learners in the classroom. Did ESL students, "outsiders" as non-English speaking students, subsequently move toward full participation as they came to grasp the language? Toohey also wonders what role native English speakers play in helping to facilitate moving

"outsiders" inside if, in fact, the children who speak English are "insiders" themselves.

Toohey recognizes that there is a perspective in second language research which views the learning of a second language as nothing more than the acquisition or copying of a body of linguistic knowledge into the minds of individual learners. With the view of Lave and Wenger in mind, that "learning is located squarely in the processes of co-participation, not in the heads of individuals" (1991, p. 13), Toohey sought to examine second language learners as legitimate peripheral participants situated in specific communities of practice. In this case, the second language learners would be seen as newcomers beginning to participate in the kindergarten community rather than internalizing a new language. In effect, Toohey was observing the nature of social engagements and how these might provide the context for learning to take place within particular communities of practice "which are specific, local, historically constructed and changing" (Toohey, 1995, p. 551).

Through her study, Toohey demonstrates that questions of how, when and if ESL learners move to full participation as they learn more of the school language are complex and involve many overlapping factors. She recognizes, that, while students struggle to negotiate their identities and access to participation and resources in the variety of communities of practice operating in the classroom, the extent to which they can speak any particular language is not necessarily the most important factor.

In the cases of the two kindergarten children in

Toohy's study, one child, Harvey, appeared to seek identity with the English speakers in the class but was rarely able to command the attention of his listeners. As a result, he was largely denied access to many of the Anglophone and bilingual childrens' activities and to classroom resources. It was only with the arrival of a more recent newcomer that Harvey was temporarily able to find an identity (that of helper) which allowed him greater access to the activities that he seemed to want to engage in.

Amy, who spoke little English, seemed to take on two identities, one that was quiet and compliant in the English-speaking community of the kindergarten while the other was assertive and talkative within the Chinese community. Is building an identity for herself in the English-speaking classroom, what motivates Amy to be quiet and acquiescent with Anglophone students? Is this a persona which allows for her acceptance and enables participation? Does she see that persona as unnecessary in the Chinese community where she sees herself as more expert, where membership is for the most part less desirable to her though it provides her with a sense of power? Are these not situations which many students find themselves in when attempting to gain entry as legitimate peripheral participants in any classroom regardless of their linguistic background?

I recall observing Fred, a student in my class, labelled as "learning disabled" and struggling on the periphery of the classroom community to find a way to move toward the status of legitimate peripheral participant in the social and intellectual worlds of his peers. His body language betrayed



a lack of confidence and a sense of belonging, as did his willingness, in a quest to be accepted, to engage in nonsensical behaviors prompted by others. I also happened upon an incident involving Fred and two of his younger siblings where Fred was clearly asserting his sense of power and dominance within that particular community. As in the incident involving Amy cited previously, Fred's identity and social practices differ according to the community of practice in which he finds himself, and the degree of safety and acceptance which he finds in either situation.

I would agree with Toohey's (1995) conclusion that the extent to which any participant can speak any particular language will shape his/her identity, practice and their access to resources, but it is not necessarily the most important factor. I wonder what effect Paley's (1992) rule, "You can't say you can't play," would have upon the inclusiveness of Amy's classroom where students, through participation, negotiation, and modelling, begin to appreciate the intrinsic rewards for extending invitations into the community of practice.

### **Communities of Practice**

Having explored some interpretations and variations of the notion of legitimate peripheral participation, I now examine its relationship to my own study. The project began as a novel study, where students were to examine and articulate their responses to the novel as well as the approaches which they discovered or felt most comfortable employing in order to discern meaning from the text.

However, this inquiry quickly grew into an all-encompassing

endeavour.

As the study began to unfold and I involved myself in the process of gathering data at a furious pace, I soon became aware of the growing cast of characters involved. This was no longer a collaborative venture between a university researcher, myself, and my class of grade five and six students, which followed a series of "book talks" involving our school staff and parents in the school community. The rapidly growing web of this research caught a plethora of participants which included (though others were also involved) the video technician, our library technician, district personnel working with the visually impaired, resource room staff, our principal, and two student teachers.

As impromptu conversations erupted on an ongoing basis, spilling out beyond the confines of the classroom into the hallways, staff room, and the community, new ideas, interpretations, connections, and experiences continually reshaped the study. This experience truly represented a model of reciprocal relation between persons and practice where participation was certainly more than a simple process of learning on the part of newcomers, and the practice was anything but static. I believe this study also represented a learning curriculum that evolved out of multiple participants situated in a specific community of practice improvisationally developing new practice engendered by pedagogical relations.

I referred to conversations spilling out of the classroom into the hallways, but also, because of the depth of our immersion in the study, these conversations seemed to

pervade everything we did. We could not discuss mathematics, or a "read aloud" novel, or current events, without some reference to the novel, *The Giver*. But I was also interested in trying to describe how students who, for the most part, might be considered newcomers or outsiders, begin to participate in the practices of our particular community. What are the sorts of communities that the newcomer is exposed to or participating in, and what aspects of the social structure contribute to or discourage participation? What identities and social practices are available in these particular communities for newcomers?

### **Communities Within Communities**

*Peripheral: of minor relevance or importance*

(Nelson Canadian Dictionary of the English Language, 1997)

As I reviewed the videotapes of the in-class sessions which took place as we shared the novel over a period of about five weeks (a process involving two complete readings), and reflected on the subsequent focus group interviews, it became clear to me that we were working with distinct communities operating within the "official" classroom community. Sometimes membership in these communities overlapped, something which stood out most notably in the focus group interviews. Students who might be considered outsiders and infrequent participants in the context of the whole class took on very different personas in the relative safety of the focus group sessions.

Hana provides one such example. The session in which

she participated gradually took on a conversational tone, a three-way discussion among the students, with the other researcher and myself occasionally paraphrasing a student response or re-directing with new questions. There was clearly an atmosphere of safety among the three and an openness to disagree with each others' opinions as well as enough comfort to discuss sensitive issues including sexuality, euthanasia, and personal attachments to the book.

While Hana only occasionally participated in whole group discussions of the book, and often appeared to withdraw into her own world, she seemed to revel in this opportunity to share her insights and personal experiences with the rest of us, even accepting differences of opinion from a peer without appearing irritated or disturbed. Her understanding of the major issues in the novel and her valuing of the process in which the class had been involved in sharing the novel were obvious in a way that she was unable to display through her infrequent contributions to class discussion. For example, when asked what she thought of the experience of reading the novel aloud a second time, she comments:

I was pretty pleased with it. I read books over all the time and sometimes you notice things that you never noticed before.

This immediately followed Sheila's earlier comment:

I thought it was boring, a waste of time. That's why I was doodling, I almost fell asleep. I'm really good at catching ideas in books because I

read so many, so when we were going through the second time I had already caught all the ideas and it seemed really boring to me because I had already caught all the ideas.

Trevor adds:

I thought the same thing at first but when I read it through the second time it answered some of my questions. I understood more about things, like when I read it the first time and I found out that the pilot was going to be released I didn't know that he was going to be killed, but when we kept reading and I found out what release means I had forgotten about the pilot ... but when we read it the second time, I remembered what release meant and that he was going to be killed.

When asked for her opinion about reading the book aloud, Hana responds:

I sort of like reading with the class because then I can stop and think about the ideas because sometimes I just whiz through books and don't even stop to look at the ideas.

Sheila interjects:

You see that's something I never do, I always stop and think about the ideas.

Hana does not appear to be disturbed about Sheila's comment, simply accepting it as another point of view. Later, however, Sheila validates Hana's input to the overall conversation, saying:

It was probably easier for her (Hana) because with her brother going through stirrings and you guys having those kinds of talks it would be an easy topic for you (for her essay), where for most people it wouldn't be.

Trevor and Hana clearly recognize the value of having revisited the text a second time and are aware of their deepened understanding from having experienced the process. Hana goes even further in acknowledging new insights and interpretations made possible as a result of stopping and talking throughout the reading of the text. She is also aware of the effect that not doing so may have had on previous reading experiences.

It is evident that for both Hana and Trevor, each return over the same ground represents layers of change both in themselves and in their writing. Bateson (1994) suggests that such returns, while they may appear to be repetitious, are often a return to the next level of a spiral. She maintains that learning is like that: the complexity of concepts or issues may require a number of turns of the spiral, where each passing continues the process of clarifying what was previously unclear. Trevor provides further evidence of "spiral learning" when Sheila reads aloud a passage from the text. He jumps in enthusiastically when

she pauses:

Ah! I get something just now! Maybe they can fly over the community but they have to be flying high.

Trevor had been struggling to understand and explain why flying over the community in *The Giver* would result in release (death) of the pilot. He wondered why, comparing it to our society, it could be anything more than a misdemeanor. Hearing the passages again and again and talking about the issue of release repeatedly had led him to new insights. Trevor and Hana demonstrate that to be actively engaged is to become a participant, that shared ways of seeing are socially constructed. Both have gained insight about their reading, and, indeed, about their learning.

Sheila, on the other hand, is either reluctant to acknowledge, or has not yet recognized, the value of rereading the text and the insights gleaned from shared thinking. She remains convinced that she learned nothing from repeated spirals, that maximum understanding was gained with the first loop. And when one examines the transcripts, as well as her essay, it is difficult to argue that she has not grasped the "big ideas" of the novel. Sheila displays a keen understanding of every issue that is broached and is able to link them to personal experiences or viewpoints. Where this may break down for her is in displaying a willingness to analyze, at least in public, her own learning, and to recognize the myriad factors which shape her learning. Her identity within this small group would seem to be one of asserting her strengths as an experienced reader, without any

apparent awareness of how her manner might be construed by the others.

I can only assume that this persona may be related to her self-image as a result of having spent two years in a multi-sensory program. This persona was not as apparent within the whole class community, although she was an active participant. Having stated this, Sheila was an attentive listener, engaging in frequent exchanges with both Trevor and Hana as they openly discussed their own experiences with sexual stirrings, among other issues. The atmosphere was certainly one of inclusion, where no one would be considered an outsider.

Trevor displayed an ability to slip freely from whole group to small group environments with equal comfort and ease. The social practices of the classroom which encouraged taking risks, forming beliefs, and exploring new ideas in an atmosphere of safety were at play in encouraging participation in whichever community he happened to be a member at any given time.

As teacher, I continue to reflect upon how I might have been more successful at creating the conditions in the classroom community for Hana to disclose her participation more openly. Not only would the class have benefited from hearing her sometimes insightful interpretations of the novel as it was read, but they may also have begun to change their attitudes and expectations towards Hana who is not yet part of the system. Just as Toohey was observing the nature of social engagements and how they might provide the context for learning in the kindergarten community, so, I think, fitting



into the social network of any class community, to some degree, is a significant condition for optimum learning.

What seems apparent, though, is the need in any class to recognize the importance of creating opportunities for varied small group exchanges as well as whole group, so that all students' voices may be heard. Through acceptance in small group situations, students such as Hana, who do not socialize or interact in usual ways, may gain the necessary comfort level to share during whole class exchanges. She did demonstrate, however, through her grasp of the "big ideas" as expressed in the smaller community, that to fully engage is to become a participant. The focus group environment enabled Hana's participation and provided the conditions for more intensive participation than the whole class situation. I would suggest that the participation of Dennis and I, however peripheral, was also a factor in that Hana had previously displayed a greater comfort level when among adults. Such conditions, I would propose, were empowering for Hana; she would indeed be considered a legitimate peripheral participant moving toward full participation status in what Lave and Wenger (1991) term the sociocultural practices of the community.

In order for Hana to gain full participant status, though, she must be legitimately peripheral on an on-going basis. Otherwise, from her usual peripheral perspective, her viewpoint might run the risk of being considered of minor relevance or importance. Trevor, on the other hand, could be viewed as a legitimate peripheral participant moving centripetally toward full participation status in adult

social worlds. He already clearly demonstrates that he does not thrive on replicating or acquiring knowledge transferred through instruction but is willing to engage in adult-child and child-child discourse in the process of learning. Both Trevor and Sara's engagement with Hana may have represented tentative explorations and conversations with her, early steps in the recognition of the value of collegiality; what Buddhist monks call "bodhisattva" (Bateson, 1994).

In the next chapter I explore in some depth how one's self-identity is intertwined with the web of relationships within the community of school and, indeed, the world. If, as I have suggested, learning is situated activity operating with Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of community of practice, then we must consider the overlapping set of relations between persons, activity and world in greater depth

## CHAPTER THREE

### Exploring the Overlapping Set of Relations Between Persons, Activity, and World

*This we know: All things are connected  
like the blood that unites us.  
We did not weave the web of life,  
We are merely a strand of it.  
Whatever we do to the web, we do to  
ourselves.*

(Susan Jeffers, adapted from Chief Seattle,  
1991)

*Rather than reducing the essential to a  
few items, points, methods, structuralism  
asserts that all thought and culture is  
part of a system which incorporates many  
elements linked in complex relationships  
to each other.*

(Grumet, 1995, p. 15)

#### **Recognition of Self As Part of a Larger Whole**

In his article, "Of Seagulls and Glass Roses," Dennis Sumara (1994) states:

The classroom becomes a myriad of ever-evolving relationships between teacher and students, students and each other, teacher and text, students

and text. Moreover, these relationships overlap and intertwine; we are indeed entangled in them, and in no way can discern their beginnings or endings. (p. 154)

*Peripheral: relating to the outward bounds of something as distinguished from its internal region or center*

(Meriam-Webster's College Dictionary, 1993)

Such "ever-evolving relationships," like those Sumara refers to, were clearly evident during our readings and sharing of *The Giver*. Classroom conversations around the book among students, teachers, support staff, and others bear clear evidence of such evolution. Few of those involved, if any, are unchanged after the experience with the text including the people involved in a more peripheral sense. For example, even well after the study when I make a statement such as "I will be elsewhere this afternoon" the overwhelming response is "Elsewhere?" with its "Giver" connotation. Immersion in the novel created an awareness that in the novel the term "elsewhere" meant "released" from society, killed. Or, when reading and working on a current events assignment, students would point out the use of vocabulary from *The Giver* including such words as distraught, chastise, or transgression, terms they were now comfortable using. The overlap and intertwining of relationships and curricular areas is apparent.

During the focus group interviews at the end of the

study a statement by a student prompted me to share my recollection of how I had pretended to admonish a colleague to be aware of the need for "precision of language" which was stressed in the community of *The Giver*. I had felt the need to explain to my colleague that after three or four readings the language of the text was always on the tip of my tongue, that I was not being critical. The students were asked if they ever found themselves, while doing other things, thinking about the ideas and issues in the novel. One student shared a story of having been at a friend's place, going into the forest and playing a game, with various individuals in role as characters in scenes from the novel. Another recalled adding terms like "confinement" and "devouring" a book into conversations with friends, only to find these friends mystified about the meaning of these words. These examples, perhaps unbeknownst to the students, represent what Davis, Sumara, and Kieren (1996) describe as "curricular action becoming part of a continuous structural coupling of curriculum actors and their world" (p. 163), where what is known and acted upon cannot be separated from one's sense of self-identity; and further, cannot be separated from the web of relationships in which that self takes shape. Enactivist theory, founded upon the conceptual work espoused by Heidegger (1962), Gadamer (1990), Ricoeur (1984) and others, supports such a view and is concerned with how individual and other, individual and environment co-evolve and are co-implicated. The student, then, is not simply contained within the context of the classroom, the student is a part of the context. At the heart of enactivist

theory is the fundamental inextricability of individual and environment. Lovelock (1979), Bateson (1979) and others would support this statement by Davis, et al (1996):

Far from merely existing relatively autonomously in the same location, individual and environment continually specify one another. Just as I am shaped by my location, so is my location shaped by my presence.  
(p.157)

Enactivist theory recognizes that learning something new depends on previously knowing something, and that we as learners are in a constant process of revision and re-interpretation. It also suggests that while we all have our own unique experiences and histories which allows us to interpret the world differently, teacher and students share a common goal of bringing forth understanding as we collectively shape the world. The students in the focus group interview discussed previously provide some evidence of the significance and valuing of such notions. When asked if there were any issues or ideas that arose with respect to the novel study, Hana was quick to share her discomfort with "The Giver" in the novel having all the memories of the community. Hana comments:

If "The Giver" has all the memories then no one can remember anything. I wouldn't like that, I like knowing my family history. You might need to use it one day.

Trevor adds:

My mom tells me stories of her childhood experiences and things like how school is different from then until now.

The students continued to share stories of their childhood, at times lost in thought, oblivious to whether or not they had a captive audience, or were being videotaped. They clearly relished the recollection of their parents shared memories of childhood as well as their own childhood memories, and seemed to grasp the connection between themselves, their parents and their historical situations, quite unlike the characters in the novel. Sheila, for example, recognized that she had been affected by her parent's reluctance to discuss puberty and issues of sexuality, including "stirrings," in that the topic caused her much discomfort in whole class situations.

Michael Ondaatje's book, *The English Patient*, chronicles the experiences of four characters living together for a period of time in a bombed-out Italian villa at the end of World War II. The main character, the burn victim, shares with the others his copy of Herodotus's *The Histories* which he has carried with him over the years, reading and rereading it many times. With each rereading he added comments and reflections between the lines and in the margins; he had tucked notes, articles, and passages from other books between the pages so that, in fact, *The Histories* became twice its original thickness. It quickly became apparent to the other

characters as they shared the book that a form of co-authoring had taken place, the English patient's identity was intertwined with that of the text and was revealed to the others through every turn of the page.

As Sumara (1995) notes, the copy of *The Histories* had become an important cultural object for the English patient, one that announced the possibility for an interpretive location. Sumara states:

For the English patient, his copy of *The Histories* becomes a commonplace for the continual re-interpretation of his sense of self identity. The book functions as material evidence of his ever-changing sense of self, and his ever-evolving relations in the world. Each time he rereads a passage, he becomes involved in a complex ritual of self-reinvention. At the same time, this cultural object--this commonplace book--also participates in communal interpretation. As others read from his book, as passages from his book are read aloud, the relations among the four at the villa change. As this is occurring, their sense of self and collective identities change. The English patient's commonplace book, then announces a commonplace location for interpretation. (p.20, original emphasis)

Through reading *The Giver* at least two times, using the novel as a commonplace book for reading and response, having repeated and varied conversations with peers, parents, and teachers, a commonplace location for hermeneutic interpretation had been created for the students where their



sense of self and collective identity was changing. The students participating in the focus group session demonstrated that they were clearly aware that they are shaped by all of their experiences, their histories contributing to their individual uniqueness. Their comments also provide evidence that text and relationships had been woven together, one becoming inseparable from the other.

### **Individual, Environment, Curriculum**

In *Peripheral Visions*, Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) shares her reflections on her inseparable roles of being an anthropologist and a parent/teacher. She cites an experience of the slaughter of a sheep in a Persian garden where she had taken her two and a half year old daughter to observe/participate in the Islamic ritual on the Feast of Sacrifice. Bateson had been so preoccupied in her role of interpreting and setting an emotional tone for Vanni that she almost failed to realize that she was encountering something new herself. The experience came to represent for Bateson "a changed awareness of learning pervading other activities" (p. 6) and an acknowledgment of the need to recognize learning opportunities often buried within spontaneous experiences. Her experience might serve to caution us of the importance of avoiding the clockwork-type machinations that are assumed in many step by step textbooks, or "right answer" approaches to teaching literature.

If we accept the enactivist perspective of learning as a continual process of environment and individual co-evolving

and co-specifying one another, then the teacher participates with the students in bringing forth understanding even as their respective past experiences or histories differ. Ashton-Warner (1986) also puts forth a strongly held view that the role of the teacher is to engineer the building of a bridge from the child's inner world outward to avoid fostering minds unable to withstand the pressure toward conformity. The teacher must be as vulnerable and open to new learning experiences as her students are. We learn and are re-shaped together.

Implicit within such a notion, then, is a recognition that if we co-specify one another the school curriculum cannot exist apart from the participants and, indeed, the world. The curriculum cannot be reduced to a collection of prescribed learning outcomes designed to prepare students for the world, when every interaction in the classroom, every experience contributes to the constant re-shaping of that world

Grumet (1988) views curriculum as a moving form. She explains: "That is why we have trouble capturing it, fixing it in language, lodging it in our matrix" (p. 172 ). Langer uses the relationship between the form and the motion of a waterfall as a metaphor for her view of curriculum. She states:

The waterfall has a shape, moving somewhat, its long streamers seeming to shift like ribbons in a wind, but its mobile shape is a permanent datum in the landscape, among rocks and trees and other

things. Yet the water does not really ever stand before us. Scarcely a drop stays there for the length of one glance. The material composition of the waterfall changes all the time; only the form is permanent and what gives any shape at all to the water is the motion. The waterfall exhibits a *form of motion*, or a *dynamic form*. (1957, p. 48; original emphasis)

The form of the waterfall is determined by the interactive dynamic of the flowing water and the surrounding landscape, each shaping the other. Within the school curriculum, if individual and environment continually specify one another, if one is shaped by the other, then so must curriculum fit within that dynamic form.

School curriculum and schooling events, then, must be shaped in a way that acknowledges they are events of life itself (Dewey, 1956). Our students indicated a growing awareness that they value their individual identities but also provided evidence that they are beginning to see how they are constantly being shaped by the world.

### **Seeing the Larger Spheres Through the Lens of the Previous Stage**

*For physicists a particle has no independent existence--a particle is a set of relations that reach out to connect to other things.*

(Sonya, in "Mindwalk," 1990, a film based on the book *The Turning Point*, by Fritjof Capra)

*The Hindus believe that Sheva's dance sustains the universe--that Sheva's dance is the universe - a ceaseless flow of energy going through a multiplicity of patterns dissolving into one another.*

(Thomas Harriman, the poet in "Mindwalk")

In "Mindwalk" (the movie adaptation of Capra's *The Turning Point*) the physicist, Sonya, used the poet's words to argue that the essential nature of matter lies in interconnections. She suggests that at the sub-atomic level there is a continual exchange of matter and energy between all parts of the cosmos; we are all part of one inseparable web of relationships and everything we do resonates with the whole. In turn, the poet responds with the religious/philosophical perspective which, in essence, relays a similar message.

The physicist suggests that modern science has left the mechanistic thinking of Descartes behind (the notion of the whole broken into parts) in favor of a new theory called systems theory. Systems theory looks at the living system as a whole, and provides for solving problems by understanding complex issues as a whole rather than by examining isolated problems. She points out that while the thinking of Descartes was useful for its time, times have changed and we

need a new way of understanding life. In science, which is, now intertwined with other fields of study, we continue to grow and evolve, building and learning from each other, from previous experiences and generations. So too it should be with education, rather than rigidly clinging to the status quo, unwilling to explore differing approaches and ideas. With each fragment of our experiences we become somewhat different, sometimes profoundly different, reshaped. This is something that should be welcomed, if it affirms a continuing process of self-definition.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I explore the use of the commonplace book as a vehicle for facilitating students' reformulation of the past with the present and the future (Sumara, 1996b). What evidence supports the notion that the use of *The Giver* as a commonplace book provided a location which enabled students to evolve, build, and learn from each other, and from past experiences and generations, if indeed it did?

I must admit that as I participated in the focus group interviews I was initially disheartened that so many students found the second reading of *The Giver* to be, in their words, "a bore", as though it somehow reflected on my teaching. It was only after reviewing the tapes many times in the light of on-going readings and conversations that I began to interpret the data differently.

The students were asked if they were able to distinguish between what they had written the first time we read the book and what they had written the second time. Sheila immediately responded:

I didn't write anything the second time except a few answers to questions I wrote before because nothing really jumped out at me because I had so many questions the first time.

I paraphrased:

So you answered your own questions the second time through?

Sheila responded:

Yes, and I didn't have much to write down near the end because I already knew what was happening.

While I have referred earlier to Sheila's response to the announcement that we were going to re-read the book ("I thought it was boring"), I think the passage bears further analysis as it relates to the use of commonplace books as a location for hermeneutic interpretation. When this passage was used previously, it was to illustrate a different point. As with any text, with each rereading we may interpret differently, depending on experiences which occurred in the interim.

I continued to probe in response to Sheila's adamant stance with respect to her complete and unchanging grasp of the ideas and issues from the first reading:

Do you think it played a part that you did so much writing and asked so many questions that that really effected your deepening understanding of the

story?

Sheila:

Yes, I read so much that every time I read a book I go through the book fast, but I also catch the ideas fast. Then after I finish the book I think about it for a few days and I kind of answer my own questions. So when we went to read it (*The Giver*) again I'd already thought about it for a few days and I'd figured out everything I needed to know, so it was boring.

Trevor's input about having questions answered and the effect on his understanding as a result of a second reading were not something that Sheila had experienced. This might suggest the need to teach "Second Readings" overtly between readings and set the stage more deliberately with questions such as "What do you notice about changes in your thinking as we read this passage/chapter again? Feel free to interrupt as new thoughts, connections, awarenesses come to mind."

The students discussed their personal reflections on the concept of "release" in the novel:

Dennis: What did you think about when you read that (about the pilot being released), do you remember?

Trevor: I do remember that I thought it was sort of mean because I personally have made many mistakes and I haven't been killed for it.

Dennis: It was pretty harsh, wasn't it?

Sheila: It would be kind of like staying back in detention. In that community you'd be thought of as a bad person so you'd have been sent to trial. Here, if you were in detention you might get grounded, depending on what you've done.

I respond:

So you're saying that the nature of the mistakes they make in the book are very much the same as the mistakes we all make on a daily basis?

Sheila: Yes, if a flyer who was learning flew over the wrong area he would just get lectured for not looking at the map properly and then he would just fly off. In the book he was called down and released.

Building on previous input, I ask:

Sheila, Trevor suggested earlier that in the second reading, because he was aware of "release" and what it really meant, it had quite a different meaning ...

Trevor: Throughout the whole book when I read it the second time, every time they mentioned release, I knew what it meant and it had a different meaning...



Me: But Sheila, you mentioned that the second reading didn't have much of an impact on you. Did those things (that Trevor mentioned) not change your reading--knowing what release was, and the outcome for that pilot?

Sheila: Yes, but when it neared the back of the book (end) and they talked about Rosemary (a previous "Giver") and how she left before Jonas (the main character and newly appointed "Giver") knew what "release" was, I kind of figured it had something to do with jail. I pick up clues really well, like with the twins (who were also released). It kind of got obvious to me, if they're not showing up in other communities, what's happening to them?

The students involved in the interactions above reveal much about their reading processes and the effect of collectively experiencing re-readings of the book. Sheila did recognize that she had answered many of her own questions through the process, likely as a result of the re-reading as well as listening to the interpretations of others during the various discussion sessions. I recall observing her, particularly during the first reading, writing ferociously and intensely in her book whenever we paused for moments of reflection and writing. Her book in fact was littered with "stickies," circled words, and entries in the margins of the text from which, upon close scrutiny, as in *The English*

*Patient*, one might interpret the complex relations gathered there; it might be perceived as an interpretive location where others come to learn more about Sheila.

I wonder, though, if despite evidence that Sheila appeared to grasp the ideas and issues, and contributed much to the discussions, her mind set about the value of re-visiting a text might not cost her rich learning opportunities. Her attitude up until this point suggested that she already had all of the answers to questions which arose and she had interpreted the text fully; there was no apparent benefit to revisiting and reinterpreting. On the other hand, by thinking about the book for days after she's completed the reading, as she stated she does, a different form of rereading may have taken place. Trevor, on the other hand, by submitting the book to multiple readings and writings, as well as repeated and various discussions, demonstrates that he is becoming aware of the complexity of his developing interpretations of the identifications and identities being co-produced.

Sheila admitted later that she could not give her copy of the book away (or throw it away as she suspected her mother might expect her to do in preparing for their upcoming move) "because it's so ... lived in." Sheila commented that she would like to give it to her children so that they could see what she was thinking. She added:

I'd like my mother to read it, writing her thoughts and answering my questions. After being passed around you'd hardly be able to read it because it's

going to be like a history right there in the book!  
(Sheila hugs the book)

Hana: I'd probably fight to get it back, it's so personal!

Trevor (who had previously taken his Post-It™ notes out) continues, with a tone of regret: If I had a book like Sheila's, with writing all through it, I'd keep it until I'm older so that I could go back and read it again, find what I wrote, and see if I have any different opinions.

The statements by both students reveal a level of sophistication not often attributed to ten or eleven year old students; that is, they have made connections between their past experiences contributing to who they are now and are cognizant that future experiences will likely result in as yet undetermined differing interpretations.

As the discussion unfolded and drew to closure Sheila seemed to recognize the impact that the whole "Giver" experience has had on her life. She displayed a possessive attitude toward the book, which provided tangible evidence of her experience. Her comments about desiring to share it not only with her children, but also with her mother in order for them to record their thoughts, and her statement that "it's going to be like a history right there in the book!" reveal her awareness of how the commonplace book, this cultural object, provided a location for participating with the other students in communal interpretations of the text,

reformulating the past with the present and the future. Trevor and Hana's comments suggest a similar awareness. What they have learned, then, becomes "a part of that system of self-definition that filters all future perceptions and possibilities of learning" (Bateson, 1994, p. 79).

How then do we provide the conditions for students to make connections in their lives about issues that are of concern to them? What are some of the factors which require consideration? I will now explore these conditions and factors.

### **Learning to Live With Ambiguity**

*When we say that we are educating someone, we are introducing that person, young or old to ways of being and acting in the world that are new to his or her experience. And it is the relation between that person's experience in the world and the new material that differentiates education from training, indoctrination, or a mere display of whatever is new or exotic.*

(Madeleine Grumet, 1995, p. 17)

When we began the study of *The Giver* with the class we had no clear vision of where the students would go with it, how they would respond to it, or how they might interpret this novel. Because of the sensitive, possibly controversial topics addressed within the book (conformity, infanticide, euthanasia, capital punishment, sexuality) we were fully

aware that various passages might evoke strong reactions or no verbal reactions at all. Unlike in a traditional novel study, the pace and flow of the initial reading was dictated by the students. That is, as Dennis and I took turns reading aloud, students could choose to interrupt us in the midst of a chapter if an idea or issue caught their attention and they wished to ask questions or respond to it. Students could also wait until the end of a chapter and then refer to key ideas which emerged. Some students were comfortable just listening and putting their hands up occasionally to raise a question or interpret a situation. Others suggested that they were unable to stay with the flow of the story if they attempted to write about an idea as the reading went on. Many students, though, chose to write down their thoughts during the reading in order to enable recollection and discussion at the end of the chapter. The direction of the discussions was largely directed by the students. We believed that such an arrangement would best provide the conditions for students to make sense of their lives in the world as it related to issues and questions of interest to them that arose in the novel. As Grumet (1995) suggests:

What is basic is not a certain set of texts, or principles or algorithms, but the conversation that makes sense of these things. Curriculum is that conversation. It is the process of making sense with a group of people of the systems that shape and organize the world that we can think about together (p.19).

Although we came to the focus group interviews with

several prepared questions to get started, we were, as in the whole group class sessions, prepared to have the students take the sessions in a number of directions. What we desired was to set a conversational tone, an atmosphere that did not require participants to adhere to a rigid question and answer format. As a result, particularly in the group including Sheila, Hana, and Trevor, students repeatedly converse with each other and us about the book without any apparent demarcation line between teacher and student.

When asked if there was anything from the novel that they were still wondering about or would like to speak to, Trevor had several questions:

Trevor: I don't understand how they could just bath naked people that they don't know at all.

(The children who were assigned the role of caregivers for the old in the community were responsible for bathing them).

A conversation among the students ensued regarding their comfort level with changing clothes in front of peers. They also noted that in our society they would not be comfortable with, nor would they be expected to be responsible for, washing elderly people. They compared their attitudes and experiences with those expected in the community of *The Giver*. Trevor continues:

Something else that was weird ... In our world if someone has a baby, that person is that baby's mom, unless they are adopted. But in *The Giver* the

birth mother has a baby and they're just taken away and assigned to some other family. Why can't the people have their own spouses and make their own babies?

Sheila: Yes, I know I want to have my own baby if I can and get married. I want to have the experience.

The conversation went from there to the issue of children reaching puberty being given pills to control sexual stirrings. Trevor was asked if he was uncomfortable with the chapter related to sexual stirrings. His response:

A little bit, I didn't understand the part where he was asking Fiona to get in the bath, it didn't make very much sense. I don't know what the point is. How do stirrings come? I don't have stirrings.

Sheila: Trevor, you'll be getting stirrings, I know I do, you'll be getting them soon enough!

Hana agrees and relates that her older brother has shared in their "at home" discussions of the book that he has experienced them. She suggests that students laugh about sensitive issues such as this because "they don't understand it very much, they don't know what else to do."

At this point Sheila shifts the conversation to ponder how they could have climate control in the community of *The Giver*. She suggests that there must be some kind of dome because "you can't stop weather." Trevor agrees with the dome concept. The students all acknowledge that there are

lots of gaps including, as Trevor says, the desire for sameness. They agree that the book leaves us to make all kinds of assumptions.

Sheila agrees and adds:

At the end they go to a community like ours, with hills and snow.

The students appear to accept the concept of a dome as an answer to the desire for this community to have "sameness," at least as it pertained to weather, if the surrounding communities do not desire it. The students in this group did not dwell further on the ending to the novel here but in an earlier "in class" discussion during the readings Trevor comments:

Maybe when they say "they'll go Elsewhere," maybe they mean he'll go up or down.

When asked to clarify Trevor responded "Heaven or Hell."

The response from the class at that time to the possibility of Jonas' death was an outcrying of "He didn't die!" Trevor said no more but discussion of alternate possibilities for interpretation of the ending continued.

The approach we used in sharing this particular text required risk-taking on our part, improvising along the way, knowing that we could be faced with unexpected questions some of which might create discomfort and others for which we might not have answers. Such conversations and opportunities for students to choose and name what matters to them is what



Grumet (1991) calls "the very heart of curriculum" (p. 75). In retrospect, however, I would suggest that we might have moved the discourse on some issues to a deeper level in order for the experience to be more meaningful. For example, when Trevor shared his confusion about what "stirrings" were, and Sheila spoke of her parents' apprehensions about discussing issues of sexuality at home, they signalled a willingness to probe the issue more deeply. We lost an opportunity to, as Fine (1988) has suggested, remold schooling as a place where we, as teachers, listen to and work with the meanings and experiences of gender and sexuality revealed by the students themselves.

From the students' perspective, their discourse indicates a willingness, and indeed an enthusiasm, to struggle with open-ended questions of relevance to their lives. Although they are reluctant to accept a less than desirable ending with respect to Jonas' future, it seems that they have moved beyond needing the author to provide a clear, tidy, predictable ending; that is, they are "learning to savor the vertigo of doing without answers," beginning to see "ambiguity as a warp of life, not something to be eliminated" (Bateson, p. 9).

As well, the exchanges provide evidence of the benefits of shared cognition and how the student's individual responses became part of the collective. When responding and making interpretations, students made use of their recollections of others' responses rather than relying exclusively on their own.

The students are beginning to see the larger sphere

through the lens of the previous stage. As a student said to Bateson's husband in the sixties, "You have to know where you stand before you can decide who you stand next to" (Bateson, 1994, p. 170). I will elaborate this notion in the following section.

### **Identity Multiculturalism / Adaptive Multiculturalism**

*Peripheral: concerned with relatively minor, irrelevant, or superficial aspects of the subject in question.*

*(The Random House College Dictionary, 1975)*

Before being introduced to "enactivist theory" I had long embraced the view that who we are is much more than what we know, say, or write about. Who we are cannot be extracted from how we act, what we stand for, and how we treat those around us, from our ways of being. This was the message in Lloyd Alexander's (1971) *The King's Fountain*, where the poor man comes to realize that the finest words are empty air without the deeds to fill them, the strongest hand is useless without a wise head to guide it, and that all the learning in the world is useless if there is no one who can understand it. If we believe that we are indeed a part of the web of life, that one part is inextricable from another, then there is implicit within that framework of thought an acceptance that individual and environment co-specify one another, that just as an individual is shaped by their location, so is their location shaped by their presence.

As enactivist theory relates to the classroom, then, the school curriculum cannot exist in isolation from the world. In a rapidly changing world our role as teachers becomes not one of preparing students for the world, but rather, in providing the conditions for students to come to recognize that who they are, their actions, and their lived experiences in some way shape the world. As Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1992) suggest, by educating we are "laying down a path in walking" (p.61) rather than following a pre-specified path. To attempt to follow a pre-specified path would be to accept the notion that knowledge is cumulative and essentially unchanging.

Davis et al (1996) make clear that while teacher and students are engaged in the simultaneous "bringing forth" of themselves this does not deny that by the act of choosing to teach a specific unit, novel or idea the teacher is participating in the shaping process of all involved. We are, in other words, implicated in all that we teach, even if we attempt the mere transmission of knowledge. What we teach is always about us. It was with this awareness in mind that I dove into the teaching of the unit on *The Giver*; aware that all participants, including myself, would be involved in a constant process of negotiation and re-negotiation, that together we would be laying down the path as we walked.

I must also admit that I did have some pre-conceived notions of the messages the students might receive from the experience, particularly as they related to the issues of sameness--discrimination on the basis of color, ethnicity, physical makeup, etc. It has long been a challenge for me as

a teacher to find ways to reduce and ultimately eliminate blatant acts of exclusion, some of which included racism. Somehow, as in the Davis et al. (1996) account of a teacher who had chosen to read *The Chrysalids* (Wyndham, 1958) in an effort to have her students come to understand more deeply the issues of racism and hatred in their worlds, I also expected more connections to be made, to have the students see the world differently. I, too, struggled with the question of why the work did not appear to have that effect.

Gadamer (1990) offers one possible explanation. Rather than the negative connotation that such words as racism and bigotry carry, Gadamer interprets the term "prejudice" as referring to *our way of seeing* or interpreting situations as a result of having lived and acted in historically effected social settings. He argues that were it not for our prejudices (our pre-judgements) which limit what we are able to see, we would not be able to see at all. Our prejudices, then, are shaped by ongoing experience, categorization, memory, and reconnection.

In my students' situation, because of living in a virtually "all white" community most of them have never experienced racism in their lives; therefore, they could not see what was outside their structural possibilities. An emotional chord was not struck as it had been for me in drawing the parallel between the quest for conformity in the setting of *The Giver* and the oppressive environment of the Indian Residential Schools, referred to earlier regarding the staff discussion of the novel. The study, however, represented for my students immersion in an experience which

provided a base that we could later build on through further literary and lived experiences.

In retrospect, it is no wonder that, despite having immersed the students in an array of related activities designed to expand the students' repertoire of images of differences including: a guest speaker who works with the sight impaired; a guest speaker working with low incidence special needs students in the district; a video on the harmonious nature of multiple ethnic groups sharing the island of Maritius; the sharing of a short story on censorship of reading materials in pre-war Eastern Europe by its author; and various related picture books such as *The Wise Old Women* (Uchida, 1994), none evoked a strong emotional response. As in the reading of *The Chrysalids* (Wyndham, 1958), while there was a possibility of these curricular events providing an occasion for structural change, they did not seem to evoke this, with the possible exception of a few students.

Unlike the case of the teacher sharing *The Chrysalids* who had immediately set about to enrich her class's experiences with various activities and guest speakers who had been the target of discrimination, and who was ultimately successful in having many students come to re-configure the structure of their experience, for my students there was a gap.

It was not until the next school year when we were immersed in a study of The Holocaust through children's literature that I came to recognize that the reading of a book does not necessarily end with its closing, nor does the

understanding of concepts unearthed within stop at the conclusion to the book.

After having countless experiences on the topic, literary and otherwise, I took the class to the Holocaust Education Center to meet a Holocaust survivor who shared vivid, horrifying accounts of her childhood in hiding during World War II. As she spoke, a rare hush fell over the room, all students aware of the sensitivity of the topic, clinging to every emotional word she spoke. Back in the classroom in the weeks and months that followed, the experience kept resurfacing.

For many of the students, half of whom had been with me the year before, the stories they had been immersed in, including *The Giver*, took on a new significance; an emotional chord had been struck, a form of re-reading and re-interpretation had taken place, what they *knew* began to change. That experience, that action "became part of the continuous structural coupling of curriculum actors and their world" (Davis et al, 1996, p. 163).

Bateson (1994) explores the concept of multiculturalism in a slightly different but related way. She suggests that majority groups are often culture bound, open to only one culture and that complacency can serve to limit curiosity. In order for individuals to develop as lifelong learners able to cope with inner or outer change, adapting and learning along the way, we must be exposed to other cultures and traditions.

Bateson goes on to break the term "multiculturalism" into two distinct, less confusing concepts, "identity

multiculturalism" and "adaptive multiculturalism." She explains that identity multiculturalism is promoted as a means of increasing confidence and self-esteem, particularly among those who have been alienated or discriminated against. It gives the individual the opportunity to say, "These are my roots, the origins of who I am."

As I reflect on the study, Tina, a member of an ethnic minority in our class, spoke very rarely and at times appeared to be confused about particular passages and the direction of discussions. She did jump in quickly, however, whenever the topic of ethnic differences came up. Tina may have felt the victim of racial discrimination in our community and could relate to feelings of exclusion. Because of her infrequent input into discussions and the seeming lack of recognition of the issue of racism within the novel by the rest of the class, it would be easy to dismiss Tina's views (and perhaps even Tina) as relatively minor, irrelevant, or superficial aspects of the subject in question. To do so, though, would be to render inconsequential the powerful commentary on her lived experience that reading of the novel provided; to suggest that Tina's response must fit within the parameters of those issues articulated and defined by the majority of the class.

I was not surprised that in the annual school wide speech contest her topic was "Racism". Interestingly, subsequent to the speech, she participated in the school "Showcase" where she displayed confidence, talent, and grace in demonstrating an ethnic dance, complete with appropriate dress. Perhaps these were the initial steps in establishing

her "identity" as well as a way for Tina to publicly build a bridge between in and out of school identities, something that all of us, regardless of ethnic origin, must do.

"Adaptive multiculturalism", on the other hand, is often promoted to increase tolerance and courtesy. Bateson stresses that its greatest importance is "in offering multiple ways of looking at the same question." (p. 168) Working at its best, adaptive multiculturalism would see a demand for access to the cultures of others in the curriculum rather than a greater focus on our own traditions, undoubtedly then enhancing the capacity of each player to contribute a rich, varied, and distinct point of view. Both identity and adaptive multiculturalism will need to be the focus of curricular awareness and decision making in the elementary classroom as we move into the twenty-first century if our young people are to come to know "how to observe, how to learn, how to adapt, how to draw on other people's expertise. How to improvise and cope with only partial knowledge and how to imagine alternatives" (Bateson, 1994, p. 176).

As Davis et al (1996) suggest, how we respond to curricular intervention is not determined by that intervention but by the learners' histories and situations. It is contingent upon the teacher, then, to explore different avenues of approach in order to broaden students' bases of experience, to recognize that units are not taught in isolation. As in the case of *The Chyrsalids*, with the array of experiences woven around the reading event, and my experience with the study of the Holocaust, we, as teachers,



must work to create situations where students can learn to see what they previously were unable to view.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Creating Curriculum Places: Parents As Part of a Richly Diverse Field of Essential Actors

*The wave rises and falls and  
loses its separateness in the  
sea.*

Dr. Nurbakhsh, Sufi Teacher (in  
Bateson, 1994, p.231)

When I began this study, and indeed, until coming to write this chapter, I viewed the topic of parent involvement in student learning as a separate issue, a chapter that would stand alone. However, after having explored the notion of community of practice, which recognizes the interconnectedness of various sets of relations, how could I then separately analyze parent involvement in communities of learning? Having already recognized the diverse range of this study's participants in Chapter Two, my emphasis here is on the role of parents as a significant part of the web, as learners themselves. I will conclude by exploring the ways we create curriculum places and link them to the cast of essential characters in the stage that is life.

Max van Manen (1994), in "Pedagogy, Virtue, and Narrative Identity in Teaching", refers to the Dutch term *mensenkennis* which, literally translated, means people-knowledge. van Manen describes *mensenkennis* as:

a kind of wisdom about how people are and how they

tend to act or react in specific situations--the significance of people's frailties, strengths, difficulties, inclinations, and life circumstances. It is a practical type of knowledge of how people's actions relate to motives, intentions, emotions, feelings, and moods. (p. 138)

Many of us know someone who has this kind of wisdom, and upon reflection, I came to recognize that individuals with *mensenkennis* are indeed rare. As I continued to ponder the term and its implications for education, I struggled with the notion of *mensenkennis* as something that could be strived for and ultimately attained, or whether it might be a particular gift with which very few among us have been blessed. To explore it more deeply meant re-visiting the work and thinking of others.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1993) writes about two dimensions of the word, the constitutive parts being reflection and action. If one is sacrificed, even in part, the other also suffers. Freire has applied the term *praxis* for this interaction. That is, action and reflection upon the world in order to transform it = *praxis*. Reflection without action results in verbalism or idle chatter, while action without reflection results in activism. This is an important distinction that ought not be passed over lightly. How often do we recognize individuals in our personal lives and the world at large who appear to be reflective, even articulate and eloquent, in analyzing events and situations? And yet when it comes to recognizing individual

responsibility to act, where pain and sacrifice is constituent, excuses are often made--"I'm too busy right now," "I don't have enough experience," "Others are more skilled at this than I," "I don't want to risk alienating certain individuals," "The cost is too great." Most of us, no doubt, have been guilty of such "verbalism", at one time or another, where the lack of action renders the reflection useless.

In working with student teachers, as we do continually in the school where I teach, providing the conditions for prospective teachers to become reflective practitioners is an ongoing challenge. Reflecting and acting upon daily "in class" experiences (such as individual lessons and interactions with students) may initially pose a problem for many student teachers, however, it is a hurdle that most will eventually clear with relative ease. The larger stumbling block appears to be grasping the role of the teacher as moving beyond the classroom towards a bigger picture--the school community and society in general. Many pre-service teachers wish to be protected from the less desirable responsibilities of dealing with "problem" students and parents, protected from stating evolving beliefs and opening themselves to being challenged on them (as our staff does in our regular sessions where we explore case studies of critical incidents in teaching); or to be protected from having to act on beliefs when, for instance, questions of ethical breaches arise.

Freire cautions, though, while in speaking their word, by naming the world, people transform it--and it is through

dialogue that individuals achieve significance as human beings--this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of "depositing" ideas in another. Additionally, it cannot become a situation where one person is dominated by the other, "nor [should it be] a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants" (p. 69).

Freire's interpretations call to mind the beautiful Hindu method of protest termed *Satyagraha*, introduced in the novel *Ordinary Magic*, by Malcolm Bosse (1981). *Satyagraha* can be defined as a method of resistance characterized by direct action, rather than passive resistance or weakness; its purpose is to confront an opponent with the demand that he make a choice. The assumption that one's oppressor can change to one's own way of thinking underlies this approach to achieving agreement. Implicit within this method is that one will also learn, by examining one's own motives, whether these are valid or not. Ultimately, *Satyagraha* ends in mutual liberation. *Satyagraha* was a practice adopted by Mohandas Gandhi, and is clearly another example of *praxis*.

*Peripheral: marginal, superficial, on the fringe*

(A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, 1982)

*Marginal: marked by contact with disparate cultures, and acquiring some but not all of the traits or values common to any one of them*

(The Random House College Dictionary, 1975)

If we accept what Freire (1993) terms "problem-posing

education" which bases itself on creativity and provokes true reflection and action upon reality while taking the people's historicity as their starting point, then no one in the school community, including parents, must be viewed as outsiders, marginals, or on the fringe. The conditions for dialogue must be such that at the point of encounter there is a sense of belief and an atmosphere where there are neither "utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only people who are attempting, together, to learn more than they now know" (Freire, 1993, p. 71). These concepts are critical in our work with student teachers, our colleagues, students and parents.

This was the atmosphere that we attempted to create for our focus group interview with parents after the completion of the study. Rather than a formal interview with set questions, we sought a more conversational tone for the sharing of experiences, observations and ideas, with the intent to have everyone learn more about the shared reading experiences. Evidence of the degree of comfort and sense of openness was sprinkled throughout the session. For instance, Mrs. Gate noted the difference between societal acceptance of people with differences now and when she was ten:

Mrs. G.: When I was ten you just never saw people that weren't normal, and if you did, everybody would stare because it was unusual. Whereas now, it's nothing to see people with no arms and legs. I think it's really a positive thing how

accepting kids are of problems that other people have. I know that I wasn't that accepting at ten years old.

Mrs. Gates' subsequent request for further such experiences provides more evidence of her awareness that learning and changes in attitudes and behaviour (praxis) come about through dialogue with children:

Mrs.G.: Are you planning on doing any more books like this? A little more mature subject matter? I wonder how it makes the kids feel when they go along with their text books and all of a sudden they're given something totally different--a totally different way of discussing it, and then it's right back to ... you know, you kind of open a doorway and then it shuts again.

Dennis: It's a different way of learning.

Mrs. G.: It's got to continue, even if it's just a book or two. Otherwise, you're taking one step forward, two steps back.

Davis, Sumara, and Kieren (1996) speak of learning being understood, not in terms of a sequence of actions, but rather, as "an on-going structural dance--a complex choreography--of events which, even in retrospect, cannot be fully disentangled and understood, let alone reproduced" (p. 153). Freire adds that "knowledge emerges only through

invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (p.53), a continuous cycle where new knowledge helps to re-shape old knowledge. The teacher participates with the students in the bringing forth of understanding, even if their respective interpretations of actions and experiences differ. Additionally, this cycle extends to the parent with his or her child, to parent with teacher, to teacher with other teachers and so on. All who are involved participate, co-specify one another, and attempt to learn more.

Mrs. Dirk shared a conversation she had with her daughter about an issue in *The Giver* which provides an example of such co-specification:

Mrs. D.: Michelle wanted to let me know what she thought the releasing was. I said that they just let them go. She made me understand that they're dead, they killed them. Also in the ending she said that they were dead too. I didn't think so, I thought that they had found this other community.

When asked if her daughter was looking for her to agree with her, or simply to discuss or inform her about the issue of "releasing," Mrs. Dirk responded that Michelle just wanted to know what she thought.

Mrs. Dirk's comments reveal the value of dialogue as it relates to issues that arise, whether from a literary



perspective or from other contexts or sources. Re-visiting texts or issues often results in re-vision, and re-interpretation, with new knowledge reshaping previously held knowledge. Both parties (mother and daughter) had re-visited the story several times and had been involved in separate discussion groups prior to coming together for their conversation. Mrs. Dirk's tone suggested that she was still re-thinking her point of view, and valuing her daughter's perspective as equal to, if not more valid, than her own interpretation of the book. This may have been because Mrs. Dirk was aware that the class had read and discussed the book twice, as she may not have. She provided evidence of valuing the process taking place in the classroom. We acknowledged that, in retrospect, a re-reading of the first part was all that would have been necessary to gain further understanding of the novel.

Mrs. Gate's question about how the students responded to other issues, and whether or not there were wide differences of opinion, enabled input from Dennis and myself regarding how we bridged, and indeed named, the issues referred to in the novel to those in the news. Euthanasia and doctor assisted euthanasia were among the issues we explored from a variety of perspectives as students responded by bringing in current articles and by sharing their personal reactions to them. Mrs. Dirk revealed her awareness of her daughter's activities, and the activities in which the class was involved by asking if all students were assigned the same article. Her question provided a segue for me to explain the open-ended nature of the assignment, which was to choose an

article in the news related to an issue addressed in the novel that had moved the students in some way. As a result, some of the articles generated rich discussion far beyond what was addressed in their summaries. I believe it is through careful examination of relevant issues that children and adults come to form their own opinions and better prepare themselves to act on beliefs.

Mrs. Gate also asked further questions in our focus group interview:

Mrs. G.: Have you noticed a difference between how the kids talked about issues before you read the book and since? Has there been a lot of difference?

Me: Yes. (Mrs. G. continues before I have an opportunity to elaborate)

Mrs. G.: I thought there would have been because of the way it was done, allowing them to view their opinions on that sort of stuff.

Dennis: I think they also liked the fact that the three of you had read the book before.

Mrs. G.: Yes, that's the first time that Trevor and I had read the same book.

Dennis: The students knew that they had another place to go to talk about it, even if they don't talk about it much.

The parents agreed with Dennis' comment, which triggered another flurry of discussion on their childrens' opinions about the issues coming into focus through the novel.

Dennis: It really raised the whole issue about how big decisions are made in our society based on little details. But the students are really aware of that, even if they haven't articulated it.

Me: And I think that even since we've finished (with the study) things keep coming up and their awareness is raised because of having discussed those things here. If something is on the news they're more likely to talk about it, to carry on and extend; to bring in follow up articles; details or articles related to it. It allows them to think about issues quite differently.

As Freire states:

Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking.

Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. (1993, p. 73)

The program content of education for the dialogical, problem-posing teacher-student then, is an organized, systematized,

and developed "re-presentation" to individuals of those things they want to know, rather than bits of information to be deposited in the students. The dialogue, however, must attempt to include the myriad cast of characters with whom the students and teachers come into contact, not the least of which is the students' parents.

Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) suggests that school is:

the effort to inculcate in the young, whether overtly or covertly, arrogantly or persuasively, something they could not or would not learn in their home environment, often something that alienates them from the home environment at the same time that it gives them access to a wider or richer world. (p. 197)

She adds that, for many children, school is leaving home, possibly never to return.

A similar view is expressed by bell hooks (1994) in *Teaching to Transgress*, when she recalls her own experience of attending an all-black school as being pure joy. She loved being a student and she loved learning. hooks acknowledges that being changed by ideas was extremely pleasurable but something which came with risks. Learning ideas that ran counter to values and beliefs held at home was a risky business. She acknowledges that at home she was forced to conform to someone else's expectations of who she should be, while school allowed her to forget that self and reinvent herself.

What are the implications for teaching children to think

critically when to do so runs counter to previous experiences in the homes of many children? If we truly believe that we must build community in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor, doesn't that community also include parents? How could we begin to bridge the gap between home and school that hooks speaks about?

*Peripheral: located away from a center or central portion*

*(Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, 1986)*

As I repeatedly reviewed the transcript of the focus group interview with the parents I noticed that there were two virtually polarized points of view about parenting represented. One person (Mrs. Gates) was very open-minded about the issues presented and discussed, and she spoke about desiring more similar such experiences for her son. As she put it, "I think you need to let them go as far as they can go and encourage that." Another parent (Mrs. Smith), conversely, was initially much more apprehensive about the subject matter and her son's ability to cope with it. This was revealed in her conversation during the session:

Dennis: Blair really got into it I think.

Mrs. G.: (to Mrs. Smith, Blair's mom) And you were so worried about whether he'd understand it.

Mrs. S.: I think he still had a little bit of problem with some of the things, but once everyone

started talking about it....I think it took him a little bit longer to figure out some of the things because he had some questions that he brought home...like it took him a long time to really figure out what this "releasing" was and...some of the other things.

Mrs. Smith seemed somewhat apprehensive about the experience and could be viewed as more protective of her son, clearly not revelling (as the other parents did) in the talk about "stirrings" and the childrens' reaction to the topic. I suspect that she was often uncomfortable with the nature of the discussion and preferred to be a peripheral participant, located away from a *central* position. I would suggest that it is not always necessary to be central to a discussion, one can absorb and process a great deal from the periphery. As well, there is no suggestion that participants (whether student or parent) need fit within any prescribed norm. Having said that, I might also interpret the Smith's home life as one where there are fewer opportunities for expression of points of view and development of critical thinking skills. However, because Mrs. Smith did choose to participate in all aspects of the study, the prospect of her son engaged in conversations about critical or sensitive issues may now be more acceptable for her. She, too, is a part of the building of community, and hopefully, is beginning to gain some sense that there is shared commitment and a common good that binds us.

While participation in one such study cannot remove

entrenched barriers and attitudes, we may have begun to build the foundations for new practice, practice which not only recognizes and values the diversity of relations involved in varying forms of community membership, but provides for parents to gain access to sources of understanding through growing involvement. The framing of the structure that is sound educational practice will occur when there is an atmosphere of openness and responsiveness among all players, including parents and teachers, when we have found ways of being that accept ambiguity and allow for learning along the way (Bateson, 1994).

### **Creating Curriculum Places**

*The fire of love did not burn  
so brightly in the beginning,  
but was fanned by those who  
passed by.*

Dr. Nurbakhsh (in Bateson, 1994, p.  
231)

In looking back I could not identify one individual whose input affected the shaping of the study more than any of the others. Certainly, when the novel was shared with staff, their apprehension about studying it with elementary students due to the potentially controversial nature of the issues addressed in the book piqued my interest. And the adamant stance of one parent among the parent group participants--"If you don't teach it in my son's classroom, I'll pass this on to him myself"--whet my appetite for

controversial but meaningful exploration.

These events, in fact, triggered my involvement in the study with my class. "The fire" was ignited by such experiences but "the flames" were fanned by all who passed by: the many participants situated in a community of practice, often informally conversing and exploring new ideas and interpretations while the study was unfolding.

Fuel continued to feed the flames as I was in the process of interpreting the data, devouring relevant literature, and talking with friends, colleagues, acquaintances, parents and students, often about what seemed at the time to be unrelated topics. Through these processes new understandings and connections often came to light and "ah ha" moments occurred, helping to clarify my interpretations for the purpose of the thesis, and also to develop new teaching practice.

Curriculum places, then, can extend far beyond the boundaries of the classroom. They can, when enabled, reach into staff rooms, into strolls along the beach, into coffee houses, restaurants or pubs, into movie theatres or remote villages on the other side of the globe.

I recall when our staff went on a weekend retreat, a group of us went for a walk through the woods to a stream with the goal in mind of planning our "buddy" activities for the coming year. The group included our grade one teacher, a student teacher, our resource room teacher, my teaching partner and me. With the excitement and enthusiasm generated among all, and an atmosphere of openness to new ideas, we brainstormed and planned rich shared reading experiences that



would grow and shift throughout the year.

I also recall how during the process of planning and teaching the unit on The Holocaust the web of peripheral participants spread in multiple directions. Phyllis, the owner of Vancouver Kidsbooks (a Vancouver children's book store) remained after hours to review countless books with me, pass on phone numbers of publishers who might offer resources as well as the names of contact persons at the Vancouver Holocaust Center, information on related plays that were taking place in the region, and personal artifacts to be shared. All of the parties reached through Phyllis responded with much enthusiasm and support. Student teachers and a former student teacher worked tirelessly with me, often over dinner, to produce with the students a Remembrance Day presentation integrally related to our on-going study. Parents joined us in our class visit to the Holocaust Center and engaged in all sessions with their children, offering very supportive feedback afterwards. Conversations on the topic erupted everywhere I seemed to go and new ideas were constantly emerging, even as I vacationed and visited the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam.

If we emphasize the socially negotiated character of meaning and the interested, concerned character of the thought and action of persons-in-activity, then curriculum places can be, and arise from, anywhere people interact with each other, not necessarily in a "schooled" environment. All that is necessary is an awareness of the relational interdependency of agent and world, activity, meaning, cognition, learning, and knowing (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.

50).

Through the course of this chapter I have explored *mensenkennis*' relationship to *praxis* and *satyagraha*, and I have pondered the notion of *mensenkennis* as something that could be strived for and ultimately attained. It has become clear to me as I have proceeded that indeed it can be attained, that one of our purposes as teachers is to create in students an awareness and belief that learning for all of us involves the whole person. Activities, tasks, functions, and understandings do not exist in isolation but are part of broader systems of relation in which they have meaning. The possibilities enabled by these systems of relation involved in learning thus implies that one engages in a process of becoming a different person. Each time, then, that we speak a true word and transform the world (a *praxis*) so then are we moving closer to *mensenkennis*, a way of being.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Schooling as Aesthetic Practice: The Joy of Ensemble Membership

#### *The Pasture*

*I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;  
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away  
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):  
I sha'n't be gone long--You come too.*

*I'm going out to fetch the little calf  
That's standing by the mother. It's so young  
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.  
I sha'n't be gone long--you come too.*

Robert Frost

For many years, probably since my youth, I have been drawn to, and fascinated by, the poem *The Pasture*. I have used this poem in the classroom for the purpose of having them engage in discussion, ask questions, and write stories about it, on at least two occasions. Until recently, I saw it more as a poem for children because it speaks of a child going out to do the chores and taking a few minutes to pause and reflect on the wonder and joy of the world. I see the poem differently now, similar to how Myra Cohn Livingston (1990) views the poem in her essay, in *Climb into the Bell Tower*. I interpret this poem as an invitation to another, the holding out of a promise of something exciting and

wonderful, as becoming emotionally involved. The pasture could be a metaphor for an invitation to a trusted friend or colleague to share the joy of a literary experience, such as in a freshly read poem or novel, new insights resulting through a conversation, or a plan for a new and exciting thematic unit. The metaphor could also extend to an invitation offered by a sextet to an audience to join in a celebration of chamber music.

This musical experience was illustrated in what I observed, and indeed participated in, as my daughter Kristen brought her graduation recital to closure with the performance of Poulenc's "Sextet for Piano, Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon and Horn." I was not surprised that Kristen chose to end the program with this piece as I knew how excited her ensemble was about it, and was also aware of the camaraderie that had developed among them. I knew how much Kristen enjoyed ensemble work when the group members truly "connected" as this group had clearly done. It is ironic that the piece is described (in the summary that accompanies my CD) as beginning with an expressive melody, announced by the oboe, which is "unfolded and discussed by the other wind instruments over a characteristic piano accompaniment" (Millington, 1989). That is what I observed as they performed; a sometimes passionate discourse with pure joy; emotion and engagement apparent in the eye contact and body language communicated among the members of the sextet throughout the performance. I felt, as an audience member, that an invitation had been extended to me to become emotionally involved with the performers.

Later, too, when Kristen was applying to graduate programs at various universities and told me about the letter she had written to accompany her application, the connections between Frost's poem, Kristen's goals, and this chapter became apparent.

Within the letter, Kristen was to give her reasons for pursuing graduate studies in flute performance. This included sharing her passion for playing, knowing that she was growing both as an individual and a musician, and communicating her desire to simply continue to play and learn in a conducive environment. She shared her love of playing with others in ensembles, her feeling of a certain affinity to it. Perhaps ensemble work might be her niche.

During a conversation with Dennis Sumara, my senior advisor, while speaking about Kristen's goals and prospects for the future, I was suddenly able to see the relationship between her ensemble work and the chapter I was struggling to write. There was clearly a reason why I had thought about the whole "ensemble" concept so much in the past few months. I had, in fact, written to Kristen about my observations and felt that such anecdotes had a place in that particular exploratory conversation with Dennis. In my commonplace book I recorded this excerpt from a note I had written to Kristen:

Somehow this card seemed most appropriate--"On the Day You Were Born" from the book of the same title. It symbolizes for me a sense of unity and the awareness that all is coming together and is intertwined--I think that that is happening for

you. It seemed that all came together so beautifully in your recital--an incredibly rich shared musical, social, and spiritual experience for all parties involved.

I recalled conversations with my daughter and continued to re-interpret various pieces of these in relation to new experiences both she and I were engaged in: how much one learned about one's own playing while listening to and playing with others; the potential growth in receiving feedback not just from one's instructor but from peers one respects and trusts; the value of sharing and comparing musical interpretations; and the sheer joy of creating music in a shared experience. There was a thread running between notions of ensemble work and collegial, collaborative, conversational school environments.

### **Conversations and Curriculum Development**

*The etymological root of "conversation" has the meaning of "living together, association, company, acquaintance."*

Max van Manen (1991, p. 177)

I continued to reflect on my conversations with Kristen, my new insights as to how ensemble work connected to the poem *The Pasture*, and conversations I had participated in concerning shared readings. Over the next few days I kept recalling Dennis Sumara's experience in reading Michael

Ondaatje's poem, "Light." For Dennis, this poem had evoked memories of a photo taken long ago of his mother and her two friends. In "Response to Reading as a Focal Practice" Sumara (1995) shares how he was ultimately moved to write a poem which, in turn, prompted further thoughts about intergenerational memories. The artifacts (the photograph, in this situation) serve both as collecting places for such memories as well as a location for continual re-interpretation as we think about them in relation to new experiences.

Similar, too, are the conversations about ensemble work, and my re-interpretations of *The Pasture*. I repeatedly revisit my memory of the sextet in performance and wonder if my interpretation of their experience is accurate. Does their engagement with the piece announce a location for deeper interpretation of themselves and their relation to the world? Am I interpreting the relationship in the light of what I know of previous conversations and their plans for future experiences? The relationship between this experience and reading books with students in schools was becoming clearer.

In thinking about these connections, and talking about them with friends and colleagues, I am becoming increasingly aware that photos, like paintings, poems, and other literary texts, serve as collecting places for our continual re-interpretation of ourselves and our relation to the world. As well, there is a complex and interwoven nature in the interpretation and re-interpretation of any cultural object. Like Sumara (1995) I am particularly curious about the relations sponsored by readings of literary texts. Julia

Kristeva (1984) suggests reading books with others in school means becoming involved in a complex system of interaction and interrelation that she terms *intertextuality*. For me this term embodies and captures the essence of our class experience in sharing *The Giver*, in that by virtue of the interactions and interrelations between readers, text and the context of reading, the interpretations of the text were constantly evolving. In looking back at our study and intervening experiences, there was indeed a plethora of full and peripheral participants and changing relations of reading as they co-existed with other relations in the school curriculum.

Each conversation I had with colleagues in the process of continuing to gather data and prepare to write this chapter reminded me that the reading of a text does not end with the last page; each time the reader thinks or talks about what has been read in relation to new thoughts and experiences, an important kind of rereading takes place (Sumara, 1995). Just as *The Pasture*, for me, extends an invitation to share a joyful experience with another, so does the act of sharing a text in the classroom offer an invitation to all participants to join in to an enriching, engaging experience.

I believe this was also the case as our Grade 5/6 class joined in a shared reading of *The Giver*. As the English patient's copy of *The Histories* (mentioned in earlier chapters) became a commonplace for continual re-interpretation of his ever-changing sense of self and his ever-evolving relations in the world, our students' personal



copies of *The Giver*, their commonplace books, also announced a possible interpretive location for their process of self-reinvention. The students' meaning making, then, is intertwined in the complexity of human/world relations, that "space opened up by the relations among reader, text, and the contexts of reading" (Sumara, 1996, p. 20), a space that is continually fluid, changing as previous experience encounters the reading experience, emerging thoughts, and our projected experience.

It is important to note that while the commonplace book might not necessarily change, the intertextual relations which include readings, related readings, and rereadings are *fluid*, although this might not always be obvious. For example, a scan through Mieka's (a student participant) commonplace book might suggest that her interpretation of the text did not change significantly from reading to reading, despite other experiences designed to help broaden students' overall interpretations emerging from the novel. However, a recent conversation with Mieka's mother Sandra, who, as teaching assistant, was working side by side with another student throughout much of the study, provides evidence to the contrary. In fact, much about Mieka's on-going experience with the text was revealed, some of which seemed surprising, given Mieka's hesitancy to share her thoughts during class sessions, small group sessions or the focus group interviews. My impression had been that she was not very captivated by the experience.

When Sandra approached her daughter about the topic, she discovered that the book was still intact two years later,

complete with "stickies" and small response journal tucked into the back page. It occupied a special place on her book shelf. Sandra asked Mieka for her overall impressions of the book, looking back on the experience. Sandra reported:

She [Mieka] responded that it was weird, so different but realistic; she could see it actually being that way. She said it was so alien (life in the community of *The Giver*), but then again she could visualize it all being reality. I guess in a way it was kind of scary for her. But what she really enjoyed was being able to put notes in the book. She first of all said that "this is very, very personal."

Sandra assured her that she knew that Mieka's book was "personal" and that she didn't have to share it, but Mieka responded that "it was okay." Sandra continued:

It did give her freedom. There are no inhibitions. When it goes into the part about the stirrings and the pills, then she's dealing with sexuality and everything; death and her own mortality. She could relate because they were all kids. It was very interesting chatting with her. And now she has that extra maturity to deal with these issues. It was interesting going back and reviewing some of these thoughts and ideas. She was suddenly going "Oh, yeah" and then "I'm going to get the book back, right?" She added, "Now that I've thought

about it again, I'm going to start reading it again!"

Mieka described how much she had bonded with the book, saying, "You have the book, you have the words on the page, but you also have me in them." Sandra and I observed how she started out with entries made in pencil and stickies. As her comfort at writing in the book increased the entries were made in pen. When Sandra asked her to explain the frequent use of colorful pen adorning the pages in the latter part of the book, Mieka explained that the novel had become a little too foreboding for her. Sandra added:

There are quotes in here about how sad this was, and the outcome was becoming predictable. She couldn't change the words on that page, but she could sure brighten it up in her own style, to make it a little lighter. But she didn't realize that at all, until we spoke last night. The color is sprinkled through the sad, painful parts including those about dying, death.

The words on the paper had come alive for Mieka. The experience of breaking down parts of the story and putting intimate thoughts into it, the "layering on" after each reading had become a part of the book. She saw herself within the text. But Mieka also knew that she didn't have to let anybody read her thoughts if she didn't want them to; this was freeing for her.

My conversation with Sandra also revealed that Mieka had

spent many after school sessions on the phone with her friends discussing the book, something that was certainly not revealed in the focus group interviews. Such behaviour is not typical of adolescents unless the location for the interpretation of a text has facilitated engagement, and in this case it seemed that the experience had in some way altered how Mieka perceived herself embedded in the world. As a result of Sandra's revelations regarding her conversation with Mieka, my curiosity was piqued regarding what other student participants might reveal.

The conversations referred to in this section led me to new insights about conversation as purposeful pedagogy and I became intent on exploring how colleagues viewed their involvement in the study, and determining what led them to either participate fully or more peripherally.

### **Conversation as Purposeful Pedagogy**

*When we link up with others, we open ourselves to yet another paradox. While surrendering some of our freedom, we open ourselves to even more creative forms of expression. This stage of being has been described as communion, because we are preserved as our selves but are short of our separateness or aloneness. What we bring to others remains our self-expression. Yet the meaning of who we are changes through our communion with them. We are identifiable as our selves. But we have discovered new meaning and different contributions, and we are*

no longer the same.

Margaret J. Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers (1996, p. 53)

*Peripheral Vision: all that is visible to the eye  
outside the central area of focus; side vision*

*(The Random House College Dictionary, 1975)*

Louise Price, our part time school librarian, became involved in our study after being privy to conversations among staff members after they had read and discussed *The Giver*. A conversation with me prompted Louise to recall a short story entitled "Pancakes" which she had written from information her mother had provided to her. The story was based on her mother's childhood in Ukraine at the time of the Communist takeover and centered around an event involving the nine year old girl and her mother in their sparsely stocked kitchen. When the two had finished mixing the batter for potato pancakes, the mother had walked over to the shelf and pulled down a cherished history book from the shelf and held it close. After gazing out the window for a few minutes, she thrust it toward her daughter and instructed her to tear the pages out and feed the fire. Although the book had been in the family for generations and had been a valued cultural object, a new law banning anything but government propaganda forced families to burn their books.

The sharing of this moving story in our class prompted an awestruck silence followed by a flurry of questions and rich discussion on the value of personal story, historical

origins, cultural objects, memory, and identity. The relationship between the issues of intergenerational memories, censorship, and "sameness" in "Pancakes" and *The Giver* became increasingly apparent to the students.

The response and student interest prompted Louise to share this poem with the class the following week:

*THE BURNING OF THE BOOKS*

*When the Regime commanded that books with  
harmful knowledge  
Should be publicly burned and on all sides  
Oxen were forced to drag cartloads of books  
To the bonfires, a banished  
Writer, one of the best, scanning the list of the  
Burned, was shocked to find that his  
Books had been passed over. He rushed to his desk  
On wings of wrath, and wrote a letter to those in  
power  
Burn me! he wrote with flying pen, burn me! Haven't  
my books  
Always reported the truth? And here you are  
Treating me like a liar! I command you:  
Burn Me!*

Bertolt Brecht, Translated by John Willett

Through the reading and discussion of this poem, Louise focussed on the irony of a writer demanding that his books be burned as a powerful demonstration of standing up for beliefs. She also revisited censorship and broadened overall understanding and interpretation of the issue; these are what Sumara (1995) calls "horizontal reading practices."

Interpersonal and intertextual experiences were becoming connected in the ever-evolving commonplace location.

Dennis and I wanted to immerse the class in a variety of related texts and experiences between readings of *The Giver* to facilitate further such connections taking place. Picture books including *The Wise Old Woman* (Uchida, 1994) which focussed on valuing the elderly in societies, *Grasper* (Lewis, 1993) which explored developing an individual identity and taking risks, and *The Story of Ruby Bridges* (Coles, 1995) which included the valuing of diversity of cultures, were shared. On two occasions the class viewed and discussed a video based on life on the island of Maritius which depicted diverse cultures living in harmony. Jan, our principal, brought the video to my attention after viewing it at a principal's meeting. She recognized the connection as a result of her participation in staff discussions of *The Giver*. The students, after numerous related reading experiences, requested an opportunity to see this video again because they now felt prepared to make more meaning of it. They were coming to appreciate the value of the rereading and re-viewing experience.

As well, two district specialists (one worked with the visually-impaired, and the other with low-incidence "special needs" students) involved the class in various awareness-raising activities. Undoubtedly these horizontal reading experiences were proving critical to the students' learning experiences. I continued to ponder the long-term impact of the experience on others.

Lynn had been one of our student teachers that year and

although her practicum had come to a successful close, she continued to be very much on the scene. She had become attached to the school and was not ready to leave quite yet. I was not surprised when she and another student teacher requested copies of *The Giver* and then asked to observe in our discussion sessions after they had listened to other staff members talking about the book. Lynn became so involved in the study that she participated verbally and also facilitated some portions of the discussions and offered suggestions for inclusion of the picture books.

Recently I thought to ask Lynn about her response to the book and what it was that prompted her desire for involvement. She agreed to chat with me, providing some of her personal reflections:

After reading *The Giver* by Lois Lowry it made me want to read other books by her.

It reminded me of *The Chrysalids* by John Wyndman that I read for English 12. Both were surreal, "what if" stories based on real possibilities, real issues taken to an extreme. At first I thought the book dealt with ideas too deep for students at a grade five/six level to grasp but at the same time I had a sense that these students would be changed by the experience--somewhere, sometime later they would "get it" or make a connection--something would trigger it and they'd see their world in a new way.



I personally connected with the book right away, it had put into story so many things I had come to know growing up--searching for autonomy, discovering who I was, a sense of "self". Children "wake up," parents do not have all the answers, do not live altruistic lives, will not always catch us when we fall. Jonas, like many children, discovered this about his father--it was always there, he just didn't question it. It's ironic, this is what we want the students to do.

I was curious as to how the book would be read to the students and how the various issues would be dealt with. I thought that some might be beyond what they could handle. I guess it was how you approached it, handled it, the openness.

Lynne recalled how when she was in school they read books such as those by Mordecai Richler. "We never read anything like this at all. I wonder if I would have had that type of experience then, if I would be different now." She added that, at that time, she had so many experiences in her life to connect it to that the book would have undoubtedly changed who she was. This literary experience, or others like it, could be pivotal in terms of affecting her thinking for future experiences and her ability to look at the world in a different way.

Implicit within Lynn's comments is a concern for the loss adults may experience, in developing the ability to make critical sense of the world and their place within it, if

they do not have such experiences in school. Is there an arbitrary age when students are equipped with the cognitive skills to immerse in such practices? If individuals enter adulthood without experience in interpreting literature and connecting it to personal experience, are they likely to be limited in their future ability to do so given that opportunities which facilitate such cognitive growth can become less accessible? Or, building on that notion, will not having such literary experiences diminish the likelihood of students valuing the selection of literary arts courses when entering university? The insightful nature of Lynn's reflections clearly indicate that this was not the case for her, but I do believe that patterns of behavior are more likely to become habit, with inflexibility diminishing the likelihood of learning along the way.

What Lynn refers to, with respect to choice of literature, is supported by van Manen (1995) when he writes about the reluctance of many teachers to engage in discussion of "interpretive literature" which deepens our understanding, but instead opting for the more time efficient approach of questions and answers, and note taking, which allows for the inclusion of more content in the curriculum. While there is enormous pressure from many quarters to "cover" sufficient curriculum, I support van Manen's point of view that the more efficient approach falls short because students only gain shallow knowledge which is easily forgotten. As teachers, we must be prepared to challenge and change the way everyone thinks about pedagogical process (hooks, p. 143).

Lynn's comments speak to van Manen's suggestions that

children learn to live in the world, reflect on the world and understand their effect on the world when they are "able to distinguish between literature that is mostly enjoyed as recreation and literature that is enjoyed for the insights it provides" (van Manen, 1995, p. 172). As Sumara maintains, meaning for the reader is intertwined in the complexity of human/world relations (1995, p. 19).

The selection of the subject matter is critical as is what van Manen calls "the teacher's tactful approach" to teaching this content. He asserts that these almost always have consequences on growth and learning that may affect a child's developing character and ability to reflect on and make critical sense of the world.

Other observations surprised Lynn and she made further connections to personal experience:

One thing I found interesting was that some people who were quite quiet and seldom participated, came out of their shells. I remember watching the tapes with you (student focus group interviews) and being surprised at how these same students not only participated but made connections to their personal lives. It was the first evidence I saw of their really transferring ideas.

Lynn later related the class experience and growing involvement in discussing *The Giver* to her entry in the Teacher Education Program. She recalled, in her module, the reading and discussion of case studies, and going through a process of constantly assessing and re-assessing the

situation:

I wondered, what's going to be said? Can I throw out anything? I decided to let it go for a bit until I felt comfortable enough to contribute something, or until it mattered to me.

There is an interrelationship between the two situations. In both cases, individuals were experiencing "coming to voice" as interpreted by bell hooks (1994). She views "coming to voice" as more than simply telling one's experience, but rather, telling it strategically so that one can also speak freely about other subjects; telling thoughtfully so as not to diminish the others' voices or perspectives--remaining aware of the entire web.

Recollections of ownership also surfaced in Lynn's reflections:

I remember discussions about ownership and how having one's own book to write in or put stickies in somehow made it more personal. I know I would want to share this book with others and I have, but I'm always worried about getting it back or not getting it back. And somehow it isn't just enough to read it, I'm propelled to talk about it afterwards. I've also shared it with a friend and yet I feel we could read it again and still have many things to discuss.

Lynn was reminded of our conversations about how reading

does not really end when you finish a book; an important kind of rereading occurs every time you think of what has been read in relation to new experiences. She shared that she was confident some students who had been a part of the experience would still be rereading the book, making connections to the story as they read other books and that "they are forever changed because of the experience." Her comments reveal an awareness that one cannot say that the relation between a book and the reader is ever static. Rather, our previous experience, our reading experience, and new thoughts emerging from these, as well as our projected experience, collect in the commonplace location woven into "one continually moving complex dynamic form" (Sumara, 1995, p. 19). Lynn wondered if the students had developed the process of stopping, processing, questioning, and marking and whether they now found it more natural and preferable. And had they come to value the process of discussing books? I determined to talk with several participants and explore such questions.

### **Student Voices Revisited**

My former students, Trevor, Brent, Maureen, and Cindy, all of whom had been in my class for the previous two years, responded positively to an invitation to talk informally about their recollections of the study of *The Giver* and their subsequent reading experiences. Trevor was ill on the day we had planned to meet, but later "touched base" with me to see if I still wanted to talk. He informed me that he still had

his copy of *The Giver* in his bag. It had been there for almost a week.

The three other students and I began by talking about the experience of having books read aloud to them in class as they followed along with their own copy, in contrast to the experience of reading quietly to oneself, in relation to our sharing of *The Giver* and other reading experiences. All three agreed that the process of reading along while the teacher read allowed for a greater understanding of the story. Maureen stated:

I find that I grasp it more if some else is reading it while I follow along. If I'm reading by myself I don't always catch stuff.

Brent added that, for him, *The Giver* was more challenging to read because there were many difficult words in the book. He suggested that reading the book aloud and discussing the terms which proved problematic along the way made meaning making possible. The three agreed that the process of reading the text aloud, discussing different vocabulary and other parts of the book created the conditions for understanding and interest.

Trevor went a step further in his discussion. He was able to distinguish the difference between literature read for recreation (escapist literature) and literature that is enjoyed for new insights provided, literature that required a person to "work" and to think (interpretive literature). As Trevor explained what he meant it was clear that he did not use "work" in a negative sense. Rather, he relished

opportunities to push and challenge himself, to know he could handle complex, sophisticated literature that deepened his understanding. He also recognized times when he simply wanted to read for pure pleasure, to be frightened by a horror story. Trevor was living an understanding of escapist and interpretive literature. He spoke of the "trade offs" in being "read to" while he followed along, as well as when reading quietly to himself, with those distinctions in mind.

Trevor articulated that the benefits to being "read to" were that "you could just follow along as someone else read and be able to stop and talk about it as it was read." He suggested that this enabled a deeper understanding of the text and helped to avoid confusion caused by not knowing what a given term meant, or by misunderstanding what was happening. One could listen as others explained the meaning they were making, or one could also engage in the conversation. The students made it clear that they found the intertextual experience of reading one's personal response in relation to the responses of all participants and their continual co-evolving experience experience to be invaluable.

However, Trevor indicated that there were times when he preferred to read interpretive literature on his own because "you can go as slowly as you want to and go back and reread sections that are confusing or just interesting enough to read again." Trevor's tone and body language clearly demonstrated that he valued independent reading times. His words suggest a level of sophistication where he is actively seeking reading experiences with interpretive literature on

an independent basis; he is learning to "live in the world and to interact with significant aspects of the world" (van Manen, 1991, p. 172). Trevor is also learning to reflect on the world and his place in it.

I asked the students to tell me about the process of rereading a text. How do they look back on the experience we had with *The Giver*, and do they see any benefits from it? Maureen responded:

I think you catch more detail. The first time you just read it and find out things, but the second time you catch bigger ideas.

The others nodded in agreement. Trevor shared that with each reading (he had read it three times) he gained a better understanding. He added that the first time was exciting for him because he never knew what was going to happen, the anticipation kept him involved. However, with the subsequent readings, even though the anticipation was no longer there, he experienced a feeling of satisfaction at knowing he had a deeper understanding. Again, there were benefits to both sorts of experiences.

All of the students had experiences with rereading books after the conclusion of the study and could share their own examples. What prompted them to reread was a desire for a deeper understanding. The first reading had "hooked" them but now they wanted to make more meaning. Cindy shared that she had borrowed a book from Maureen because Maureen had talked about it so much. Later they had discussed it further. Trevor recalled having read several books in his



personal library as many as four times. While he didn't use stickies as a location for interpretation and reinterpretation, he was conscious of how his thoughts had changed between readings, aware "of his ever-changing sense of self, and his ever-evolving relations in the world" (Sumara, p.20). His memories served as a commonplace location for reinterpretation. The way he held the book suggested that he might well consider it a sacred object.

I asked the students to express their opinions about the use of other texts and the experiences between readings to facilitate further connections among the texts, and their own layers of comments and personal experiences, experiences that Dennis Sumara (1995) terms "horizontal readings." By way of example I listed several titles we had used in our study of the Jewish Holocaust the following year. This prompted a flurry of input, with students listing off a stream of titles that we had shared in both studies, including picture books, novels, and short stories. I realized that there seemed to be no line delineating between the two studies, the students thought of them as intertwined, the "big ideas" as the same. It occurred to me that while these two studies had not unfolded back to back by chance (although separated by a summer), the students' view of these studies as interconnected revealed a growing level of sophistication. They no longer viewed "units" or curricular areas as being studied in isolation.

As to the effects of "horizontal readings" on their understandings, the students all concurred that there were many benefits. Maureen stated that "if issues are said

differently in another book it can help you understand them better." I asked if such experiences enabled them to view the world in a different way and they responded in detail. Brent commented:

I see the importance of not being racist. When you talk about it (racism) you see the importance of other things that happen, not just in books. There was an item in the news recently that made me think of accepting differences and what we talked about in the class.

The article the students read could be viewed as yet another commonplace location for interpretation; a form of rereading had again taken place. Each time Brent reinterprets the memory of the book, the boundaries of the commonplace location shift (Sumara, 1995). Maureen added:

Things like that (racism) happen in different ways, it might not just be Jewish people who are discriminated against, sometimes it happens in smaller ways; but they still mean something--like the East Indian people coming here and living, and sometimes not being treated very fairly.

Cindy's input was unintelligible on my tape but fortunately I had paraphrased what she had said:

You're saying that you can read about incidences in a text but unless you talk about them, connect them to other examples and experiences, make it personal

in some way, it might just be a story?

She responded: Yes.

It became clear to me that a seed had been planted in these students, affecting their overall attitudes about acceptance of other cultures through the study of *The Giver*, attitudes which had been further shaped by the study of The Holocaust and subsequent reading experiences. Both studies became interpretive locations for the students to make sense of their environment and their place in it. They are beginning to see their education as a life project.

### **Pedagogical Engagement**

Laurie Scholefield (1996) uses the term "engagement" to describe how we perceive ourselves as embedded in the world rather than apart. Berleant (1993) shares a similar view in suggesting "there is a physical interaction of body and setting, a psychological interconnection of consciousness and culture which serves to make a person inseparable from his or her environmental situation" (p.85). Both writers support the notion that engagement is an act of empathy that provokes us into acting and thinking differently about the interaction. Scholefield explains that, through the process of joining harmoniously with the world in commitment, activity, and emotion, we come to know where we fit in the web of life.

In her study, Shelby Sheppard (1993) distinguishes between "substantive engagement" which involves "worthwhile

knowledge and understanding and an individual's active agency" (p.21), the commitment by a learner to a venture which will be transformative, and "pedagogical engagement," which refers to the transaction between the learner and his/her environment. She asserts that the two views are not disparate, but rather, they mesh nicely. Through the process of many shared reading experiences where subject matter content was selected carefully, the students interviewed provide evidence that they have in some way been transformed. Their perceptions of the world and their place in it had shifted. The various texts and experiences became the location for engaging students' interests.

As van Manen (1991) asserts, such transformation occurs as a result of more than careful selection of subject matter content; the tactful approach of the teacher is critical. Our approach must be one of providing conditions for all students to move from the periphery of classroom experiences to full participation. The teacher must also be open to using "peripheral vision" to take in the wealth of input available to curricular decision making which may be located outside the central area of focus. I have come to realize the immeasurable value of conversation as a vehicle, not only in shaping curriculum, but also for developing a practice that invites all members of the community, not just selective invitations, to share the joy of a walk into the pasture, and the joy of ensemble membership--a way of saying "You come too." I explore this notion in the final chapter, as well as a recognition of the transformational, never-ending aspect of intertextual literary experiences.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Making Connections: Fitting the Pieces Together

#### *The Book*

*There is no frigate like a book  
To take us leagues away,  
Nor any courser like a page  
Of prancing poetry.*

*This traverse may the poorest take  
Without oppress of toll;  
How frugal is the chariot  
That bears a human soul!*

Emily Dickinson

### Selective Invitations

*Peripheral: marginal, superficial, on the fringe*

*(A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, 1982)*

*Marginal: marked by contact with disparate cultures,  
and acquiring some but not all of the traits or values  
common to any one of them*

*(The Random House College Dictionary, 1975)*

It is important to reflect on the messages we send when we beckon others to join us in an engaging experience, when we extend the invitation of ensemble membership. Are we

limiting the gesture of inclusion to an exclusive core group or are there multiple points of entry? A major aspect of our work as teachers may be to serve as catalysts in the process of drawing out unique elements in our classrooms, of savouring the voice of each and every individual, of enabling the possibility of a rich engagement with a literary text regardless of how the path may meander or encounter obstacles. Leigh comes to mind when I think of the possibilities for such individuals; he personifies much of what this study is about.

Leigh joined my class the fall after we had completed the study of *The Giver*. I already knew him, having taught math in his grade 3/4 class once a week the previous year. Leigh caught my attention at that time because he rarely did any work, but instead spent most of his time calling out comments unrelated to math, or wandering around the classroom. I was to discover that, along with complex family problems, the stigma of having been retained a year in his primary years, and the instability suggested by attending his third school, Leigh also had a deeply embedded phobia about mathematics. He could not master the subject and was aware that day by day he was falling further and further behind his peers; he had quit. Leigh labelled himself "stupid". Without doubt Leigh was establishing a reputation for himself with his peers (as he was also new to the school) as class clown, "cool," and ambivalent about learning. Consequently, he spent much time in the school office and hallways.

While I had observed that Leigh was involved in fewer altercations at school as the year passed, I knew that he was

going to be my "challenge" the next year. As students were leaving the school for summer vacation in June, I recall him coming by my class, standing apprehensively in the doorway and calling to me, "Mrs. van der Wey?" He said in a low voice, "I'm not very good at math." I could see how worried this boy, who wore a facade of cockiness and coolness, was about coming into a grade 5/6 class.

Leigh's year in my class began much as his previous year had ended; he did very little work. However, during a class discussion which occurred as I introduced our study of The Holocaust, focussing on a current newspaper article about restitution being granted to Holocaust survivors, Leigh volunteered that the role of one of the survivors had been much like that of Schindler, from the movie "Schindler's List." I remember being surprised that he had watched the movie and even more impressed that he had made a connection between the two events. Literature was to become a connector between Leigh and myself. However, I was not to fully appreciate the extent of this until much later, although we developed a quiet, unspoken rapport as the year unfolded.

The following spring, when it was clear that Leigh was headed for a rash of "In Progress" plans, we called a meeting involving Leigh, his mother, our principal, the resource room teacher and me, to formulate a plan of action. "In Progress" is granted a student who has not satisfactorily met the learning outcomes in any curricular area during a given term. A plan is written detailing the outcomes to be met and the activities yet to be completed. I brought to Leigh's attention my observation that he had not demonstrated in any

way his understanding of a novel we had just completed in class; he acknowledged this to be true. Leigh had been absent for much of the study, in fact.

When I suggested to him that he might want to substitute another novel, he immediately brightened and said he would like to reread *The Friendship*, a short novel by Mildred Taylor (1987) set in Mississippi during the 1930's, which we had shared as a "read aloud" book earlier that term. This novel chronicled challenging times for the Logan family as they struggled to survive amidst racism, segregation, and the Great Depression. Just after we concluded reading the story, Leigh asked to borrow the book so that he could finish it (he had been absent when we completed the reading in class). My colleagues and I were astounded when he listed all the characters and shared his recollection of key events. When I brought the book for him, Leigh pointed to the picture on the cover and identified each character, as well as what was happening in the scene. An interpretive location had been announced by the relations among Leigh, the novel, and the contexts of reading. My impromptu offer to substitute another text, even one that might be deemed "easier," serves as a reminder that there can never be an absolute set agenda governing teaching practices; there must be flexibility, and room for spontaneous shifts in direction, in order for students "to be seen in their particularity as individuals and interacted with according to their needs" (hooks, 1994, p.7).

Leigh's response prompted me to lend him a copy of another Mildred Taylor (1975) short story, "Song of the



Trees" which was set in the same location and involved the same family as in *The Friendship*. He read much of the story that evening and wasted no time the next day giving me an update on what page he was on, as well as providing a summary of events. Leigh finished reading the book by the following day. As I was to discover later, these reading experiences served as collecting places for Leigh's memories of lived experiences.

The grade six year began inauspiciously for Leigh as change proved difficult for him to handle, and he had established a comfort level in our class the previous year. Leigh had previously indicated a desire to stay in my class for grade six but as a result of enrolment changes I had been assigned a grade 4/5 class. He occasionally dropped by for brief chats in September (once to see if I had any more small, hardcover booklets that he might use as a journal), but those visits became less frequent as the year flew by. I was aware that the year was not going well for him.

It was not until I began conversations with colleagues and former students (these are described in Chapter Five) that I recognized the importance of having Leigh share, in more detail, his relationship to the texts he had read. He agreed to meet with me one day during his lunch break.

I asked Leigh if he could recall what it was about those texts that had caught his attention. He replied:

They were just interesting....(pause) They were about racism. They were interesting but sort of sad too.

When I reminded Leigh that he knew all of the characters and could recall all of their names even months after completing the books, he explained, "I just listened when you were reading and I memorized them." He acknowledged this was not usually the case for him.

Leigh revealed that he had reread the whole book, *The Friendship*, when he had borrowed it to read the conclusion after having been absent. He had now read this novel three times. Nearly a year later, Leigh recalled in specific detail an incident involving the boy in the story, Little Man. The store operator had told Little Man his hands were so black that seeds could be planted in them. Little Man had been offended and deeply humiliated because he was very particular about his cleanliness and appearance. Leigh also recalled an incident from another Taylor (1977) book, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, which the class had requested for reading aloud after completion of *The Friendship*. Leigh recounted:

I remember, every time the bus driver drove by as they (the Logan family) were walking to school, he made sure he splashed them with mud...and there was no place for them to go. Little Man was really choked.

I commented, "You seemed to really relate to that boy."

He responded:

I like to be clean all the time. If I get dirty, I don't feel right...It's like, gross! But Bill

(another student in his class), he can get muddy all the time playing football, but he doesn't care.

When I asked Leigh to comment on another short story that had been published with *The Friendship*, he shared that he did not like it and had not finished reading it. The setting was different, there were different characters. Leigh favoured the dirt roads and plantation setting of the deep south, and he preferred the Logans. Leigh continued: "But there was 'Song of the Trees.' Again, he could recall large chunks of the story.

It seems a certain "literariness" had emerged for Leigh in his unique relation with the texts (in this case, the Logan series), a relation which allowed enough space for him to participate in the shaping of meaning. While Leigh does not yet have the words to express fully his relation to the text, this is undoubtedly more complex than simply a connectedness to one character. A commonplace location had been opened, enabling Leigh to shift perspective and understand his life differently (Sumara, 1995).

When asked if there had been other books he had read or that had been read to him which had touched him as deeply Leigh paused:

There was that one that you read to us, *I Am David*. It was sort of based on the same thing but he was in a prison camp and he escaped. He wasn't black, he was white--he was Jewish. He escaped and went to search for his mother.

Leigh suggested that the similarity between *I Am David* (Holm, 1965) and the other books was that "He (David) had to struggle to get through...to survive."

Another title he mentioned was *Tell No One Who You Are* (1994). "The one we had diaries for." Leigh added, "I still have mine." The book was set in Belgium during World War Two and chronicled a young Jewish girl's experiences as she was shuffled from one hiding place to another, hoping eventually to be reunited with her family. We supplied the students with diaries which had black and white photos of themselves pasted on the inside cover. Our intent was to provide the conditions for students to relate more deeply to the characters. Students also had "stickies" on which to record questions, comments, or vocabulary as the story was read aloud to them; they could elaborate more fully later if they chose to do so. Leigh recalled that *Tell No One Who You Are* was a true story and he liked those kinds of books--"like Mildred Taylor's." When asked if he always kept his books, Leigh responded, "Not always, I lose some."

I concluded the conversation by asking Leigh if he would likely reread another book again. Without pause, he answered:

Yeah, I probably would, probably *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. (Pause) ...Someone told me that every time you read a book things are different, you read it again and different things pop out to you.

He added that in reading about the Logans, "It felt like you were actually in the story, like you were one of the

characters."

As we brought the session to closure I promised that I would bring Leigh a copy of the novel. I delivered it to Leigh at lunch time several days later. Toward the end of the day I noticed him heading for another class, the book still clutched in his hand. For Leigh, it seemed, the book took on the significance of what Laurie Scholefield (1996) calls a sacred object. It offered the opportunity to "re-memory" his relation to the text and the Logan family, to recall memories and reinterpret his life in relation to his world. As Scholefield suggests, the object--its color, its feel--is now sacred because of how it has announced itself to Leigh, and that object (in this case, the book) is central to the uniquely human activity of making meaning. Perhaps, for Leigh, it may be the location, as Scholefield states, "where words stop but meaning carries on in sweeping, rolling waves of comprehension (p.49)." For Leigh, as for Mieka (whom I referred to in the previous chapter as having placed her copy of *The Giver*, completely intact, in a special place on her book shelf), the placement of his novel tucked in a certain way under his arm, drew attention and "causes the unfolding of memory and meaning (p.39).

The next day Leigh saw me in the office and came in to inform me that he was now on page thirty. He quickly provided details of the events he had read thus far and was then on his way.

## **Patterns and Parallels: Looking Back and Looking Forward**

I thought about Leigh and his story for days after we chatted and while I listened to his voice on tape as I transcribed. I shared the experience with friends as I continued to process the implications for reading practice in schools, and I reflected on conversations I had previously with our principal about the conditions that may have contributed to Leigh's having "connected" to my class as he did. In analyzing the data and reflecting on the exchanges with Leigh, a pattern began to emerge which paralleled and in some ways went beyond the experiences of the students I spoke with and wrote about in previous chapters.

In every instance where Leigh had cited a book which had "hooked" him, it had first been shared in a "read aloud" situation and conversations had taken place around it. Further, all of the books focussed in some way on the themes of social injustice and intolerance, themes which had touched him deeply. The scaffolding provided had enabled him to engage in intertextual experiences with the class as well as helping him to interpret more deeply as he reread the text on his own.

Similar to the students interviewed in the previous chapter, Leigh saw a thread running through the texts he had read linking his growing understanding of himself within the complexity of human/world relations. These texts were, for him, horizontal reading experiences which, during the time that he was immersed in them, had the effect of changing the

way he interacted with the class and with me. I believe those literary experiences sponsored past and present conversations between Leigh and me. These conversations take on a tone of seriousness and maturity, neither of which were evident in the not so distant past. Leigh's rereading of *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, in relation to other texts and experiences, including our conversation, will serve to broaden his overall interpretations emerging from the novel.

As I continued to ponder the implications of Leigh's literary experiences, it occurred to me that there was a distinct difference between Leigh's demonstration of understanding of the literature and those of the students mentioned previously. Leigh had not conformed to an orthodox practice of displaying the connections he had made in some written form.

In the unit on *The Giver*, the students responded to the novel in relation to other readings and experiences, their responses and interpretations being resymbolized in the form of formal essays. The students were expected to attempt to produce a new text which would become the location to demonstrate the co-emergence of their personal responses to the novel, identification and analysis of an issue emerging from the reading, and a "horizontal" interpretation of their involvement in other shared reading experiences. While I acknowledge that this group of ten and eleven-year-old students found the task to be taxing and rigorous, the process of synthesis was rendered manageable by both the material layering on of responses in their books, and also the intense, ongoing conversations in which students had been

deeply immersed. The sample essays (see Appendix B) clearly demonstrate the students' growing understanding of the intertextual nature of reading, writing and other lived experiences.

Sumara (1995) has coined the phrase "focal practice" to describe an activity, such as the essays, which serves to render visible intertextual and interpersonal relations, in particular, those which are subject to interpretation and reinterpretation following some form of rereading.

The term "focal reality" is used by philosopher Albert Borgmann (1992) as "a place holder for the encounters each of us has with things that of themselves have engaged mind and body and centered our lives" (p.119). Borgmann adds that signs of "focal things" include, "commanding presence, continuity with the world, and centering power" (p.119). "Focal things" must also be in the care of human practices. He provides examples of a hike in the wilderness, the grooming of a horse, the playing of a Stradivarius violin, as such "focal things" which enable the participant to better understand and interpret the way in which we and the world are engaged in an ever-evolving relation. I would argue that while Leigh may not have met the criteria for involvement in a focal practice in the example cited, his engagement with the Logan family in Mildred Taylor's books and their relationship to other texts for him represent a focal reality; the intertextual experiences have served to engage his mind and body and centered his life. He may yet resymbolize his responses and interpretations in the form of some newly created text.



The role of the teacher, then, is to ensure that students such as Leigh are not treated as marginal, on the fringe of society, having deviated from the general configuration of a "good, organized, and just" society (Freire, 1993, p.55). Rather than setting criteria for "insider" status which requires all students "to acquire all of the traits or values common to any one of them" (*Random House College Dictionary*, 1975), the structure of oppression, we must "transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves' (Freire, 1993, p.55).

### **Intergenerational Memories and Curriculum**

Since reading of Sumara's experience with Ondaatje's poem, "Light," mentioned in the previous chapter, I have continued thinking about the pedagogical significance of intergenerational memories. The writing of Sumara's poem in response to "Light," and the evoked memories of the photograph of his mother came to represent a focal practice beginning to take form. These represented a way for Sumara to better understand his family history in relation to the present and projected perceptions and interpretations.

I think back to literary experiences where stories of grandmother/grandchild memories served to condition my experience so that past, present and future experiences were understood differently. The conditions had been created for me to interpret my history of interactions in the world (Sumara, 1995).

I wonder about Leigh's fascination with Mildred Taylor's

stories, stories which are written from snippets of tales told to her by her father, describing his childhood experiences. All are intergenerational connections. Have not the experiences with such literature also contributed to Leigh reinterpreting his interactions in the world in some way?

Recently, I observed the excitement and attentiveness generated in the classroom when students shared letters they received from their grandparents, letters containing stories about how their families had come to emigrate to this country. After our class had an opportunity to meet with Canadian author Sheryl McFarlane, the students spoke repeatedly of her tales of intergenerational experiences forming the basis of most of her writing. The students pointed out that one of my favorite picture book authors, Patricia Polacco, similarly drew upon intergenerational family memories as raw material for her books. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the sharing of Polacco's books was to announce a commonplace location for students to begin a process of reinterpretation of themselves and their family history. These literary fictions, then, serve a very specific cultural function in rendering visible the usually invisible relations between students and the world (Sumara, 1995).

It is these usually invisible relations between practice and a language to express them that have become visible for me through the writing of this thesis. Before coming to closure, before stopping to rest and contemplate further, as Bollnow (1961) points out some paths are about, rather than

being about destination, I retrace the journey of interconnections and interpretations I have made in this process.

In order for students to engage in intertextual experiences there are several conditions which have become clear to me as being critical through the gathering, analysis, and interpretation of data, through reviewing relevant literature, through conversations and the writing of this thesis.

In order for students to gain a sense of membership in a community of practice there must be a reciprocal relation between persons and practice where learners become legitimate peripheral participants and move toward full participation in that practice; a practice that itself is in constant motion. Legitimate peripherality involves, then, participation as a way of learning, "of both absorbing and being absorbed in-- the culture of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1993, p.95). All students must have opportunities to engage in conversations around a literary text, whether through small group or whole group interaction, on an on-going basis.

As well, as Wheatly and Kellner-Rogers (1996) suggest, within that community of practice we must simultaneously mold our individual identity and create a contribution to a greater whole. While independent student response to the literary text, then, contributes to the ongoing process of intertextual interpretation, it is the opportunities for horizontal readings and shared reading experiences provided by and with the teacher which allow such experiences to become generative. As Davis, Sumara, and Kieren (1995)

recognize, "It is the co-emergence of individual and collective identities that must be interpreted in the school classroom rather than just the development of individual understanding" (p.25). Such an understanding would also, then suggest an ability to see, "not only color vision but culture vision, the ability to see the multiple worlds of others" (Bateson, 1994, p.53).

Additionally, I recognize that in creating curriculum places we cannot negate or diminish the role of parents as partners and legitimate peripheral participants in our ongoing quest to learn more. Through involvement in the sharing of the literary text, parents become aware of resources used in the context of the classroom, processes their children are engaged in to make meaning, and opportunities for contributing to curricular decisions. In the process we collectively begin to bridge the gap between home and school which can occur when children are learning to think critically. As well, curriculum places can occur wherever people interact with each other with an awareness that we are all interdependent and can learn more working collectively than apart.

I also recognize the immeasurable value of conversation as purposeful pedagogy. By allowing curricular decisions to spread beyond the confines of the classroom, teachers open the doors to unlimited creativity and diversity. The range of horizontal experiences my class was immersed in came about as a result of input from peripheral participants, through shared planning and impromptu conversations among staff. These horizontal experiences enabled deeper understandings of

issues, understandings which not only allowed students to resymbolize them into a new form, but also to relate them to new experiences.

Critical to the notion of creating conditions which contribute to students engaging in intertextual experiences is the awareness that the invitation be extended to all members of the community of practice. While all may not yet be able to resymbolize their understandings in a new form, teachers must create opportunities for students to more clearly understand their place in complex human/world relations.

I have defined and interpreted the term "peripheral" in its various forms throughout the thesis in order to demonstrate how our process of meaning making is contingent on new understandings being married with old notions. For example, for many, being peripheral may take on a negative connotation and suggest at best, being located at the outer boundaries of a situation, at worst, being considered marginal, on the fringe, superficial, relatively minor or irrelevant. Through analysis we come to recognize that one can be located away from a center or internal region and still be a valid, valued participant. Further, Lave and Wenger's (1993) phrase "legitimate peripheral participant" elevates the term to greater significance, in that its meaning suggests that learners inevitably participate in communities of practitioners, and that the mastery of skill requires newcomers to move toward full participation. This is what teachers must facilitate for all of their students.

Finally, I think it is important to restate that while I

consider all of the above to be factors which contribute significantly to the creation of intertextual experiences, it is only through the passion and energy which the teacher brings to the classroom environment that the likelihood for successful pedagogical relationships will be achieved. The teacher must be willing to work with the students to understand literary readings and the complex, ever-evolving set of relations embedded within. There must be a willingness to take risks, to live with ambiguity, to be prepared to improvise along the way. Jean Little's (1990) poem, based on memories of childhood, sums it up best for me, and in many ways reflects how I view the nature of this thesis. It is written from the perspective of Kate, one of her favorite young characters:

*Who You Are*

*Today Miss McIntyre, our guidance counselor, said, "You have to decide who you are and where you're going."*

*Sounds simple, just decide. I think it **is** simple for Emily. She's Emily Blair, daughter of the Manager of the Royal Bank, member of the Presbyterian Church, high achiever in school, sister of Louisa. And she knows where she's going--or she thinks she does. She wants to teach Grade One. She's out of her mind. Only ... maybe not....*

*I could do that about me too, of course. There are labels that partly fit. I too am the child of my parents, except I'm beginning to see that Mother and Dad*

are not just my parents, the way I used to think. They are separate people with thoughts of their own. Sometimes they seem like strangers. I don't belong to a church. I'm Jewish--but I don't know, yet, what being Jewish is going to mean to me.

That's not what I'm talking about though, or it's only one part of it. I want to find out how important it is, my being Jewish, but I'd like to be everything else too. And nothing else.

I'd like to teach Grade Five but I want to write a symphony and live in a lighthouse and fly an airplane. I'd like to be a policewoman and I've thought about being a nun. I think I'll write books...I sound like a little kid.

There are so many roads, though. I can't write a symphony, I know that. And I'm pretty sure I'd never make it as a nun. But I just might keep bees, if I really wanted to. Except...what about my lighthouse?

Right now I could be anybody, Miss McIntyre. Can't you understand that? I could be anybody at all.

I'm not ready to choose and besides, I'm choosing more than one road. I'm putting myself together, Miss McIntyre. But it is like a jigsaw puzzle. I keep finding new pieces.

If you were once a puzzle, you soon found the edge pieces and fitted yourself inside. There is no edge to me yet. I hope the picture turns out to be worth the work. I hope I never discover an edge. (1990, p. 86-87)

Without their memories it would be impossible for authors such as Jean Little or Patricia Polacco to write with such a sense of knowing the uncertainty with which most youth view the future. The students involved in the study of *The Giver* reacted strongly to the notion of having one person in the community known as "the receiver of memories" having responsibility for storing all cultural and historical memories. The systematic "release" of the elderly, who were viewed as no longer contributing to society, evoked emotional responses as students, through "horizontal readings" and other experiences, deepened their understanding of the potential impact such practice would have on their world. The elimination of shared experiences and memories seemed unthinkable for them; their emerging sense of self is deeply intertwined in historical roots as well as in an ongoing sense of communal identity.

If our sense of identity emerges from a fusing of past, present, and projected perceptions and interpretations of our relations with other persons and other things, as Sumara suggests, then one of our responsibilities as teachers is to ensure an abundance of choice and opportunity for young readers to engage in intertextual literary experiences. Stories from intergenerational memories can provide this.

It appears that Leigh and the students who were re-interviewed are aware that they have been transformed through experiences occurring in the process of this study. We are all irrevocably changed through repeated intertextual experiences of a sometimes profound nature where what we see, like a crystal, "depends upon our angle of repose"



(Richardson, p. 522).

As Smith (1991) points out, in good improvisational jazz (or chamber music, for that matter) one thing leads to another with only one fundamental requirement, that group members pledge to stay with each other, listening to "subtle nuances of tempo and melody with one person never stealing the show for the entire session" (p. 198). Smith adds that hermeneutic pedagogy demands that we give ourselves over to conversation with young people and together build a common shared reality "in a spirit of self-forgiveness, a forgetfulness which is also a form of finding oneself in relation to others" (p. 198). Such is my intent.

It seems fitting to close with a poem written by another grade five student, quoted in *Literature Circles and Response* (Hill, Johnson, and Noe, 1995, p. 111):

We read the same books,  
And I've heard your ideas,  
And I wonder, why do we  
Think so differently?

We read the same books,  
And I've heard your ideas,  
And I wonder, why do we  
Think so alike?

I wonder if these questions  
Will ever be answered, but  
wondering about these answers

causes me to know who I am.

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# **APPENDICES**



**APPENDIX A**

**SAMPLES OF STUDENT COMMONPLACE BOOK PAGES**

## What period of time are they in?

Then all of the citizens had been ordered to go into the nearest building and stay there. IMMEDIATELY, the rasping voice through the speakers had said. LEAVE YOUR BICYCLES WHERE THEY ARE.

Instantly, obediently, Jonas had dropped his bike on its side on the path behind his family's dwelling. He had run indoors and stayed there, alone. His parents were both at work, and his little sister, Lily, was at the Childcare Center where she spent her after-school hours.

Looking through the front window, he had seen no people: none of the busy afternoon crew of Street Cleaners, Landscape Workers, and Food Delivery people who usually populated the community at that time of day. He saw only the abandoned bikes here and there on their sides; an upturned wheel on one was still revolving slowly.

He had been frightened then. The sense of his own community silent, waiting, had made his stomach churn. He had trembled.

But it had been nothing. Within minutes the speakers had crackled again, and the voice, reassuring now and less urgent, had explained that a Pilot-in-Training had misread his navigational instructions and made a wrong turn. Desperately the Pilot had been trying to make his way back before his error was noticed.

NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE WILL BE RELEASED, the voice had said, followed by silence. There was an ironical tone to that final message, as if the Speaker found it amusing; and Jonas had smiled a little, though he knew what a grim statement it had been. For a contributing citizen to be released from the community was a final decision, a terrible punishment, an overwhelming statement of failure.

## Released?

Even the children were scolded if they used the term lightly at play, jeering at a teammate who missed a catch or stumbled in a race. Jonas had done it once, had shouted at his best friend, "That's it, Asher! You're released!" when Asher's clumsy error had lost a match for his team. He had been taken aside for a brief and serious talk by the coach, had hung his head with guilt and embarrassment, and apologized to Asher after the game.

Now, thinking about the feeling of fear as he pedaled home along the river path, he remembered that moment of palpable, stomach-sinking terror when the aircraft had streaked above. It was not what he was feeling now with December approaching. He searched for the right word to describe his own feeling.

Jonas was careful about language. Not like his friend, Asher, who talked too fast and mixed things up, scrambling words and phrases until they were barely recognizable and often very funny.

Jonas grinned, remembering the morning that Asher had dashed into the classroom, late as usual, arriving breathlessly in the middle of the chanting of the morning anthem. When the class took their seats at the conclusion of the patriotic hymn, Asher remained standing to make his public apology as was required.

"I apologize for inconveniencing my learning community." Asher ran through the standard apology phrase rapidly, still catching his breath. The Instructor and class waited patiently for his explanation. The students had all been grinning, because they had listened to Asher's explanations so many times before.

"I left home at the correct time but when I was riding



Jonas has the  
same eyes as  
I have? Did they  
have the same  
birthmother or  
birthfather?

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Father put his bike into its port. Then he picked up the basket and carried it into the house. Lily followed be-

hind, but she glanced back over her shoulder at Jonas and teased, "Maybe he had the same Birthmother as you."

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Those kind of  
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person.

"What's his comfort object called?" Lily asked, picking up the stuffed creature which had been placed beside the newchild in his basket.

Father glanced at it. "Hippo," he said.

Lily giggled at the strange word. "Hippo," she repeated, and put the comfort object down again. She peered at the unwrapped newchild, who waved his arms.

"I think newchildren are so cute," Lily sighed. "I hope I get assigned to be a Birthmother."

"Lily!" Mother spoke very sharply. "Don't say that. There's very little honor in that Assignment."

"But I was talking to Natasha. You know the Ten who



# STIVE

lives around the corner? She does some of her volunteer hours at the Birthing Center. And she told me that the

*Being a  
birthmother  
must be pretty  
depressing.*

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you can try some at the Nurturing Center. Mother sug-  
gested.

"Yes, I think I will," Lily said. She knelt beside the basket. "What did you say his name is? Gabriel? Hello, Gabriel," she said in a singsong voice. Then she giggled. "Ooops," she whispered. "I think he's asleep. I guess I'd better be quiet."

Jonas turned to the school assignments on his desk. Some chance of *that*, he thought. Lily was *never* quiet. Probably she should hope for an Assignment as Speaker, so that she could sit in the office with the microphone all day, making announcements. He laughed silently to himself, picturing his sister droning on in the self-important



# Asker What Has Happened

voice that all the Speakers seemed to develop, saying things like, ATTENTION. THIS IS A REMINDER TO FEMALES UNDER NINE THAT HAIR RIBBONS ARE TO BE NEATLY TIED AT ALL TIMES.

He turned toward Lily and noticed to his satisfaction that her ribbons were, as usual, undone and dangling. There would be an announcement like that quite soon, he felt certain, and it would be directed mainly at Lily, though her name, of course, would not be mentioned. Everyone would know.

Everyone had known, he remembered with humiliation, that the announcement ATTENTION. THIS IS A REMINDER TO MALE ELEVENTH GRADERS THAT OBJECTS ARE NOT TO BE REMOVED FROM THE RECREATION AREA AND THAT SNACKS ARE TO BE EATEN, NOT HOARDED had been specifically directed at him, the day last month that he had taken an apple home. No one had mentioned it, not even his parents, because the public announcement had been sufficient to produce the appropriate remorse. He had, of course, disposed of the apple and made his apology to the Recreation Director the next morning, before school.

Jonas thought again about that incident. He was still bewildered by it. Not by the announcement or the necessary apology; those were standard procedures, and he had deserved them — but by the incident itself. He probably should have brought up his feeling of bewilderment that very evening when the family unit had shared their feelings of the day. But he had not been able to sort out and put words to the source of his confusion, so he had let it pass.

It had happened during the recreation period, when he had been playing with Asher. Jonas had casually picked

There was only one other child's bicycle there, that of a female Eleven named Fiona. Jonas liked Fiona. She was a good student, quiet and polite, but she had a sense of fun as well, and it didn't surprise him that she was working with Asher today. He parked his bicycle neatly in the port beside theirs and entered the building.

"Hello, Jonas," the attendant at the front desk said. She handed him the sign-up sheet and stamped her own official seal beside his signature. All of his volunteer hours would be carefully tabulated at the Hall of Open Records. Once, long ago, it was whispered among the children, an Eleven had arrived at the Ceremony of Twelve only to hear a public announcement that he had not completed the required number of volunteer hours and would not, therefore, be given his Assignment. He had been permitted an additional month in which to complete the hours, and then given his Assignment privately, with no applause, no celebration: a disgrace that had clouded his entire future.

"It's good to have some volunteers here today," the attendant told him. "We celebrated a release this morning, and that always throws the schedule off a little, so things get backed up." She looked at a printed sheet. "Let's see. Asher and Fiona are helping in the bathing room. Why don't you join them there? You know where it is, don't you?"

Jonas nodded, thanked her, and walked down the long hallway. He glanced into the rooms on either side. The Old were sitting quietly, some visiting and talking with one another, others doing handwork and simple crafts. A few were asleep. Each room was comfortably furnished, the floors covered with thick carpeting. It was a serene and

They actually see people nude? yuck!

slow-paced place, unlike the busy and distribution where the daily occurred.

Jonas was glad that he had, over his hours in a variety of places so the differences. He realized, though one area meant he was left with: not even a guess — of what his A

He laughed softly. Thinking about it again, Jonas? he teased himself. But he suspected that with the date so near, probably all of his friends were, too.

He passed a Caretaker walking slowly with one of the Old in the hall. "Hello, Jonas," the young uniformed man said, smiling pleasantly. The woman beside him, whose arm he held, was hunched over as she shuffled along in her soft slippers. She looked toward Jonas and smiled, but her dark eyes were clouded and blank. He realized she was blind.

He entered the bathing room with its warm moist air and scent of cleansing lotions. He removed his tunic, hung it carefully on a wall hook, and put on the volunteer's smock that was folded on a shelf.

"Hi, Jonas!" Asher called from the corner where he was kneeling beside a tub. Jonas saw Fiona nearby, at a different tub. She looked up and smiled at him, but she was busy, gently washing a man who lay in the warm water.

Jonas greeted them and the caretaking attendants at work nearby. Then he went to the row of padded lounging chairs where others of the Old were waiting. He had worked here before; he knew what to do.

"Your turn, Larissa," he said, reading the nametag on

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But his mother laughed again in a reassuring, affection-

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Maybe "STIRRINGS" You're or Stir-

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attracted to people of the opposite sex!

"That's all?" he asked.

"That's all," she replied, returning the bottle to the cupboard. "But you mustn't forget. I'll remind you for the first weeks, but then you must do it on your own. If you forget, the Stirrings will come back. The dreams of Stirrings will come back. Sometimes the dosage must be adjusted."

"Asher takes them," Jonas confided.

His mother nodded, unsurprised. "Many of your groupmates probably do. The males, at least. And they all will, soon. Females too."

"How long will I have to take them?"

"Until you enter the House of the Old," she explained.

"All of your adult life. But it becomes routine; after a while you won't even pay much attention to it."

She looked at her watch. "If you leave right now, you won't even be late for school. Hurry along."

"And thank you again, Jonas," she added, as he went to the door, "for your dream."

Pedaling rapidly down the path, Jonas felt oddly proud to have joined those who took the pills. For a moment, though, he remembered the dream again. The dream had felt pleasurable. Though the feelings were confused, he thought that he had liked the feelings that his mother had called Stirrings. He remembered that upon waking, he had wanted to feel the Stirrings again.

Then, in the same way that his own dwelling slipped away behind him as he rounded a corner on his bicycle, the dream slipped away from his thoughts. Very briefly, a little guiltily, he tried to grasp it back. But the feelings had disappeared. The Stirrings were gone.

the community behind. But he felt a very deep sadness that he had left his closest friend behind. He knew that in the danger of his escape he must be absolutely silent; but with his heart and mind, he called back and hoped that with his capacity for hearing-beyond, The Giver would know that Jonas had said goodbye.

It had happened at the evening meal. The family unit was eating together as always: Lily chattering away, Mother and Father making their customary comments (and lies, Jonas knew) about the day. Nearby, Gabriel played happily on the floor, babbling his baby talk, looking with glee now and then toward Jonas, obviously delighted to have him back after the unexpected night away from the dwelling.

Father glanced down toward the toddler. "Enjoy it, little guy," he said. "This is your last night as visitor."  
"What do you mean?" Jonas asked him.

Father sighed with disappointment. "Well, you know he wasn't here when you got home this morning because we had him stay overnight at the Nurturing Center. It seemed like a good opportunity, with you gone, to give it a try. He'd been sleeping so soundly."

"Didn't it go well?" Mother asked sympathetically. Father gave a rueful laugh. "That's an understatement. It was a disaster. He cried all night, apparently. The night crew couldn't handle it. They were *really* frazzled by the time I got to work."

"Gabe, you naughty thing," Lily said, with a scolding little cluck toward the grinning toddler on the floor. "So," Father went on, "we obviously had to make the

decision. *Jonas Gabriel's release when we had the meal*  
Jonas *can't believe*  
*Jonas's dad*  
lease?" *I would actually*  
Father *vote against*  
*our best try,*  
"Yes *Gabe!*  
Lily *absolutely calm.*  
Jonas worked at *When will he be released?"*  
"When?" he asked. "First thing tomorrow morning. We have to start our preparations for the Naming Ceremony, so we thought we'd get this taken care of right away."

"It's bye-bye to you, Gabe, in the morning," Father had said, in his sweet, sing-song voice.

Jonas reached the opposite side of the river, stopped briefly, and looked back. The community where his entire life had been lived lay behind him now, sleeping. At dawn, the orderly, disciplined life he had always known would continue again, without him. The life where nothing was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual. The life without color, pain, or past.

He pushed firmly again at the pedal with his foot and continued riding along the road. It was not safe to spend time looking back. He thought of the rules he had broken so far: enough that if he were caught, now, he would be condemned.

First, he had left the dwelling at night. A major transgression.

Second, he had robbed the community of food: a very

"All done. That wasn't so bad, was it?" Jonas heard his father say cheerfully. He turned aside and dropped the syringe into a waste receptacle.

Now he cleans him up and makes him comfy, Jonas said to himself, aware that The Giver didn't want to talk during the little ceremony.

As he continued to watch, the newchild, no longer crying, moved his arms and legs in a jerking motion. Then he went limp. He had fell to the side, his eyes half open. Then he was still.

With an odd, shocked feeling, Jonas recognized the gestures and posture and expression. They were familiar. He had seen them before. But he couldn't remember where.

Jonas stared at the screen, waiting for something to happen. But nothing did. The little twin lay motionless. His father was putting things away. Folding the blanket. Closing the cupboard.

Once again, as he had on the playing field, he felt the choking sensation. Once again he saw the face of the light-haired, bloodied soldier as life left his eyes. The memory came back.

*He killed it! My father killed it!* Jonas said to himself, stunned at what he was realizing. He continued to stare at the screen numbly.

His father tidied the room. Then he picked up a small carton that lay waiting on the floor, set it on the bed, and lifted the limp body into it. He placed the lid on tightly.

He picked up the carton and carried it to the other side of the room. He opened a small door in the wall; Jonas could see darkness behind the door. It seemed to be the

same sort of chute into which trash was deposited at school.

His father loaded the carton containing the body into the chute and gave it a shove.

"Bye-bye, little guy," Jonas heard his father say before he left the room. Then the screen went blank.

The Giver turned to him. Quietly, he related, "When Rosemary had applied for the process. I showed me the full child of that beautiful asked he syringe and

"You weren't brave enough? It is, what it means. I was with horror. Wretched as Rosemary told herself. Therapist said away."

The Giver said in a bitter voice. "You were in a bitter voice."

Jonas said to himself, the feeling of terrible pain clawing its way forward to emerge in a cry.

*Jonas must be pretty mad at his father for lying!*



But his mother laughed again in a reassuring, affectionate way. "No, no," she said. "It's over the pills. You're ready for them."

Why do you

Jonas took both tools, he knelt with Asher, then had your pill, turned his bike, and ridden back while Jonas waited.

have to take pills

It was the sort of thing one didn't ask a friend about because it might have fallen into that uncomfortable category of "being different." Asher took a pill each morning; Jonas did not. Always better, less rude, to talk about things that were the same.

Now he swallowed the small pill that his mother handed him.

"That's all?" he asked.

"That's all," she replied, returning the bottle to the cupboard. "But you mustn't forget. I'll remind you for the first weeks, but then you must do it on your own. If you forget, the Stirrings will come back. The dreams of Stirrings will come back. Sometimes the dosage must be adjusted."

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".....and her feet with the sponge.  
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"Now your back. Lean forward and I'll help you sit up." Jonas put his arm around her and supported her as she sat. He squeezed the sponge against her back and began to rub her sharp-boned shoulders. "Tell me about the celebration."

"Well, there was the telling of his life. That is always first. Then the toast. We all raised our glasses and cheered. We chanted the anthem. He made a lovely good-bye speech. And several of us made little speeches wishing him well. I didn't, though. I've never been fond of public speaking.

"He was thrilled. You should have seen the look on his face when they let him go."

Jonas slowed the strokes of his hand on her back thoughtfully. "Larissa," he asked, "what happens when they make the actual release? Where exactly did Roberto go?"

She lifted her bare wet shoulders in a small shrug. "I don't know. I don't think anybody does, except the committee. He just bowed to all of us and then walked, like they all do, through the special door in the Releasing Room. But you should have seen his look. Pure happiness. I'd call it."

Jonas grinned. "I wish I'd been there to see it."  
Larissa frowned. "I don't know why they don't let children come. Not enough room, I guess. They should enlarge the Releasing Room."

"We'll have to suggest that to the committee. Maybe they'd study it," Jonas said slyly, and Larissa chortled with laughter.

"Right!" she hooted, and Jonas helped her from the tub.

But his mother laughed again in a reassuring, affectionate way. "No, no," she said. "It's just the pills. You're ready for the pills, that's all. That's the treatment for Stirrings."

Jonas brightened. He knew about the pills. His parents both took them each morning. And some of his friends did, he knew. Once he had been heading off to school with Asher, both of them on their bikes, when Asher's father had called from their dwelling doorway, "You forgot your pill, Asher!" Asher had groaned good-naturedly, turned his bike, and ridden back while Jonas waited.

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*I think  
the stirrings  
are new!!!!!!*

with pleasure as he massaged her feet with the sponge.

"But Roberto's life was wonderful," Larissa went on, after a moment. "He had been an Instructor of Elevens — you know how important that is — and he'd been on the Planning Committee. And — goodness, I don't know how he found the time — he also raised two very successful children, and he was *also* the one who did the landscaping design for the Central Plaza. He didn't do the actual labor, of course."

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When the  
get released  
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they go?

What  
happen  
to  
Roberto?

14

It was much the same, this memory, though the hill seemed to be a different one, steeper, and the snow was not falling as thickly as it had before.

It was colder, also, Jonas perceived. He could see, as he sat waiting at the top of the hill, that the snow beneath the sled was not thick and soft as it had been before, but hard, and coated with bluish ice.

The sled moved forward, and Jonas grinned with delight, looking forward to the breathtaking slide down through the invigorating air.

But the runners, this time, couldn't slice through the frozen expanse as they had on the other, snow-cushioned hill. They skittered sideways and the sled gathered speed. Jonas pulled at the rope, trying to steer, but the steepness and speed took control from his hands and he was no longer enjoying the feeling of freedom but instead, terrified, was at the mercy of the wild acceleration downward over the ice.

Sideways, spinning, the sled hit a bump in the hill and Jonas was jarred loose and thrown violently into the air. He fell with his leg twisted under him, and could hear the crack of bone. His face scraped along jagged edges of ice

That MUST hurt!

and when he fell, shocked and still, feeling as if a hatchet lay with a hole "fire" and He tried to

Then, to he have to give him the painful memories.

He screamed and vomited onto the frozen snow. Blood dripped from his face into the vomit. Sobbing, "Nooooo!" he cried, and the sound disappeared into the empty landscape, into the wind.

Then, suddenly, he was in the Annex room again, writhing on the bed. His face was wet with tears. Able to move now, he rocked his own body back and forth, breathing deeply to release the remembered pain.

He sat, and looked at his own leg, where it lay straight on the bed, unbroken. The brutal slice of pain was gone. But the leg ached horribly, still, and his face felt raw.

"May I have relief-of-pain, please?" he begged. It was always provided in his everyday life for the bruises and wounds, for a mashed finger, a stomach ache, a skinned knee from a fall from a bike. There was always a dab of anesthetic ointment, or a pill; or in severe instances, an injection that brought complete and instantaneous deliverance.

But The Giver said no, and looked away. Limping, Jonas walked home, pushing his bicycle, that evening. The sunburn pain had been so small, in comparison, and had not stayed with him. But this ache lingered.

Its weird that they  
have to tell there  
dreams and when  
the get stirrings  
they have to take  
a pill.

---

~~Not good  
and~~

He was newly aware that Gabriel's safety depended entirely upon his own continued strength.

They saw their first waterfall, and for the first time wildlife.

"Plane! Plane!" Gabriel called, and Jonas turned swiftly into the trees, though he had not seen planes in days, and he did not hear an aircraft engine now. When he stopped the bicycle in the shrubbery and turned to grab Gabe, he saw the small chubby arm pointing toward the sky.

Terrified, he looked up, but it was not a plane at all. Though he had never seen one before, he identified it from his fading memories, for The Giver had given them to him often. It was a bird.

Soon there were many birds along the way, soaring overhead, calling. They saw deer; and once, beside the road, looking at them curious and unafraid, a small reddish-brown creature with a thick tail, whose name Jonas did not know. He slowed the bike and they stared at one another until the creature turned away and disappeared into the woods.

All of it was new to him. After a life of Sameness and predictability, he was awed by the surprises that lay beyond each curve of the road. He slowed the bike again and again to look with wonder at wildflowers, to enjoy the throaty warble of a new bird nearby, or merely to watch the way wind shifted the leaves in the trees. During his twelve years in the community, he had never felt such simple moments of exquisite happiness.

But there were desperate fears building in him now as well. The most relentless of his new fears was that they would starve. Now that they had left the cultivated fields

behind them, it was almost impossible to find food. They finished the meager store of potatoes and carrots they had saved from the last agricultural area, and now they were always hungry.

Jonas knelt by a stream and tried without success to catch a fish with his hands. Frustrated, he threw rocks into the water, knowing even as he did so that it was useless. Finally, in desperation, he fashioned a makeshift net, looping the strands of Gabriel's blanket around a curved stick.

After countless tries, the net yielded two flopping silvery fish. (Methodically) Jonas hacked them to pieces with a sharp rock and fed the raw shreds to himself and to Gabriel. They ate some berries, and tried without success to catch a bird.

At night, while Gabriel slept beside him, Jonas lay awake, tortured by hunger, and remembered his life in the community where meals were delivered to each dwelling every day.

He tried to use the flagging power of his memory to recreate meals, and managed brief, tantalizing fragments: banquets with huge roasted meats; birthday parties with thick-frosted cakes; and lush fruits picked and eaten, sun-warmed and dripping, from trees.

But when the memory glimpses subsided, he was left with the gnawing, painful emptiness. Jonas remembered, suddenly and grimly, the time in his childhood when he had been chastised for misusing a word. The word had been "starving." You have never been starving, he had been told. You will never be starving.

Now he was. If he had stayed in the community, he

Then all of the citizens had been ordered to go into the nearest building and stay there. IMMEDIATELY, the rasping voice through the speakers had said. LEAVE YOUR BICYCLES WHERE THEY ARE.

Instantly, obediently, Jonas had dropped his bike on its side on the path behind his family's dwelling. He had run indoors and stayed there, alone. His parents were both at work, and his little sister, Lily, was at the Childcare Center where she spent her after-school hours.

Looking through the front window, he had seen no people: none of the busy afternoon crew of Street Cleaners, Landscape Workers, and Food Delivery people who usually populated the community at that time of day. He saw only the abandoned bikes here and there on their sides; an upturned wheel on one was still revolving slowly.

He had been frightened then. The sense of his own community silent, waiting, had made his stomach churn. He had trembled.

But it had been nothing. Within minutes the speakers had crackled again, and the voice, reassuring now and less urgent, had explained that a Pilot-in-Training had mistread his navigational instructions and made a wrong turn. Desperately the Pilot had been trying to make his way back before his error was noticed.

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His error had lost a match for his team. He had been aside for a brief and serious talk by the instructor. His head with guilt and embarrassment, Asher after the game.

He had been about the feeling of fear as he pedaled over path, he remembered that moment when the aircraft had crashed. Each-sinking terror when the aircraft had crashed. It was not what he was feeling now with the crash. He searched for the right word to describe the feeling.

He had been full about language. Not like his friend, who had said too fast and mixed things up, scrambling for phrases until they were barely recognizable. It was funny.

He had remembered the morning that Asher had dashed into the classroom, late as usual, arriving breathlessly in the middle of the chanting of the morning anthem. When the class took their seats at the conclusion of the patriotic hymn, Asher remained standing to make his public apology as was required.

"I apologize for inconveniencing my learning community." Asher ran through the standard apology phrase rapidly, still catching his breath. The Instructor and class waited patiently for his explanation. The students had all been grinning, because they had listened to Asher's explanations so many times before.

"I left home at the correct time but when I was riding



er said.  
girl, "Go  
and I are  
om her

womaner nodded. "Yes," she said, "this talk will be a private one with Jonas."

This time  
I know what  
released is  
so it had  
a different  
impact on  
the story

2

Jonas watched as his father poured a fresh cup of coffee. He waited.

"You know," his father finally said, "every December was exciting to me when I was young. And it has been for you and Lily, too, I'm sure. Each December brings such changes."

Jonas nodded. He could remember the Decembers back to when he had become, well, probably a Four. The earlier ones were lost to him. But he observed them each year, and he remembered Lily's earliest Decembers. He remembered when his family received Lily, the day she was named, the day that she had become a One.

The Ceremony for the Ones was always noisy and fun. Each December, all the newchildren born in the previous year turned One. One at a time — there were always fifty in each year's group, if none had been released — they had been brought to the stage by the Nururers who had cared for them since birth. Some were already walking, wobbly on their unsteady legs; others were no more than a few days old, wrapped in blankets, held by their Nururers.

"I enjoy the Naming," Jonas said.

His mother agreed, smiling. "The year we got Lily, we

blue sky. There were tufts of sparse grass, a few bushes and rocks, and nearby he could see an area of thicker vegetation: broad, ~~cl~~ <sup>they</sup> He could hear noises: ~~cl~~ <sup>they</sup> perceived the word ~~g~~ <sup>have</sup> ~~g~~ <sup>guns?</sup> immense crashing thud ~~s~~ <sup>s</sup> from the trees.

He heard ~~g~~ <sup>g</sup> from the place where ~~ubbery~~ <sup>ubbery</sup>, he was reminded ~~, that there~~ <sup>, that there</sup> had been a time when flesh had ~~different colors~~ <sup>different colors</sup>. Two of these men had dark brown skin; the others were light. Going closer, he watched them hack the tusks from a motionless elephant on the ground and haul them away, spattered with blood. He felt himself overwhelmed with a new perception of the color he knew as red.

Then the men were gone, speeding toward the horizon in a vehicle that spit pebbles from its whirling tires. One hit his forehead and stung him there. But the memory continued, though Jonas ached now for it to end.

Now he saw another elephant emerge from the place where it had stood hidden in the trees. Very slowly it walked to the mutilated body and looked down. With its sinuous trunk it stroked the huge corpse; then it reached up, broke some leafy branches with a snap, and draped them over the mass of torn thick flesh.

Finally it tilted its massive head, raised its trunk, and roared into the empty landscape. Jonas had never heard such a sound. It was a sound of rage and grief and it seemed never to end.

He could still hear it when he opened his eyes and lay anguished on the bed where he received the memories. It

continued to roar into his consciousness as he pedaled slowly home.

"Lily," he asked that evening when his sister took her comfort object, the stuffed elephant, from the shelf, "did you know that once there really were elephants? Live ones?"

She glanced down at the ragged comfort object and grinned. "Right," she said, skeptically. "Sure, Jonas."

Jonas went and sat beside them while his father untied Lily's hair ribbons and combed her hair. He placed one hand on each of their shoulders. With all of his being he tried to give each of them a piece of the memory: not of the tortured cry of the elephant, but of the *being* of the elephant, of the towering, immense creature and the meticulous touch with which it had tended its friend at the end.

But his father had continued to comb Lily's long hair, and Lily, impatient, had finally wiggled under her brother's touch. "Jonas," she said, "you're *burring* me with your hand."

"I apologize for hurting you, Lily," Jonas mumbled, and took his hand away.

"Accept your apology," Lily responded indifferently, stroking the lifeless elephant.

"Give ~~up~~ <sup>up</sup> ~~once~~ <sup>once</sup>, as they prepared for the day's work: ~~aren't you allowed to~~ <sup>aren't you allowed to</sup> ~~applied from the rules~~ <sup>applied from the rules</sup> ~~was a rude ques-~~ <sup>was a rude ques-</sup> ~~tion of his questions,~~ <sup>tion of his questions,</sup> ~~defended by even the~~ <sup>defended by even the</sup>

of his no rule against it.

Wend

"Grand parents?"  
"Grandparents. It meant parents-of-the-parents, long ago."

"Back and back and back?" Jonas began to laugh. "So actually, there could be parents-of-the-parents-of-the-parents-of-the parents?"

The Giver laughed, too. "That's right. It's a little like looking at yourself looking in a mirror looking at yourself looking in a mirror."

Jonas frowned. "But my parents must have had parents! I never thought about it before. Who are my parents-of-the-parents? *Where* are they?"

"You could go look in the Hall of Open Records. You'd find the names. But think, son. If you apply for children, then who will be their parents-of-the-parents? Who will be their grandparents?"

"My mother and father, of course."  
"And where will they be?"

Jonas thought. "Oh," he said slowly. "When I finish my training and become a full adult, I'll be given my own dwelling. And then when Lily does, a few years later, she'll get her own dwelling, and maybe a spouse, and children if she applies for them, and then Mother and Father —"  
"That's right."

"As long as they're still working and contributing to the community, they'll go and live with the other Childless Adults. And they won't be part of my life anymore."

"And after that, when the time comes, they'll go to the House of the Old," Jonas went on. He was thinking aloud. "And they'll be well cared for, and respected, and when they're released, there will be a celebration."

"Which you won't attend," The Giver pointed out.  
"No, of course not, because I won't even know about it. By then I'll be so busy with my own life. And Lily will, too. So our children, if we have them, won't know who their parents-of-parents are, either."

"It seems to work pretty well that way, doesn't it? The way we do it in our community?" Jonas asked. "I just didn't realize there was any other way, until I received that memory."

"It works," The Giver agreed.  
Jonas hesitated. "I certainly liked the memory, though. I can see why it's your favorite. I couldn't quite get the word for the whole feeling of it, the feeling that was so strong in the room."

"Love," The Giver told him.  
Jonas repeated it. "Love." It was a word and concept new to him.

They were both silent for a minute. Then Jonas said, "Giver?"  
"Yes?"

"I feel very foolish saying this. Very, very foolish." *Why*  
"No need. Nothing is foolish here. Trust the memories and how they make you feel."

"Well," Jonas said, looking at the floor, "I know you don't have the memory anymore, because you gave it to me, so maybe you won't understand this —"

"I will. I am left with a vague wisp of that one; and I have many other memories of families, and holidays, and happiness. Of love."

Jonas blurted out what he was feeling. "I was thinking that . . . well, I can see that it wasn't a very practical way

**APPENDIX B**  
**SAMPLES OF STUDENT ESSAYS**

## The Giver

In this essay I will be focused on one of the issues that appeared in <sup>the</sup> The Giver <sup>by Lois Lowry</sup>, namely birth. In the book The Giver there wasn't a lot of choice about the children. In fact, you get assigned children someone else gave birth to! Some people might think this is a little bizarre but to them it is normal for they live in a community of sameness. The people who give birth to the babies are called 'birthmothers'. Birthmothers get wonderful food and mostly just play games while the <sup>child</sup> is developing inside her. But there are rules too. Three years means three births, and that is all. After that they will be laborers for the rest of their adult lives, until they enter the 'house of the old', which is basically like a retirement home. In fact, there is very little honor in being a birthmother. After a child is born it is sent to the 'Nurturing Center' where it will be taken care of until December, when it will be assigned to a 'family unit'. Each family unit will apply for 1 girl and 1 boy. They will receive each kid separately. Most people would say sameness is bad but to them it means control.

The Giver was an exciting book. } does this fit here?

? ? how  
could you  
possibly  
make the  
point  
complete

will you

mainly

people  
this  
secretly

I think the whole idea of having birthmothers is weird. I would not be able to live knowing that the child I care for is not even related to me. I guess that if I had grown up with rules like that, I wouldn't think anything is abnormal because that is what I would have been taught. If I knew what Jonas knew about grandparents and such I would probably go to the Hall of Records and look up who my real parents and grandparents were. Sameness is a good way to control the population but I still don't like it for some people want to be their own person, free to make decisions for yourself. That is what I think of the issue... birth.

Now I am going to be writing about a similar issue in our society that I think relates to birth in the giver. My issue relates to women - these days who get other women to carry a child for her. In the giver the children have a birthmother and a mother who actually raises them. Although in our case women who have someone else give birth to their child do that because maybe she isn't strong enough to give birth to children or maybe she has a disability or something that may prevent her from carrying a child.

Do you need this?

How could this be possible?

I'm sure it happens a lot but there are some differences, like, perhaps at least the woman knows at least a bit about the girl who is going to carry a child for her. That is the only I can relate to birth in the Giver and I ~~can~~ think this book should be shared for many more years.

# Choices

23/05/95

In the society of a book called The Lives by Lois Lowry many important topics arise. For example..... release, is it okay to release someone if a person is not perfect mentally or physically?

Sameness, <sup>is anything</sup> is it the right decision to make everyone and everything the same?

Birth, should women be able to have their own kids?

Food, should people be able to eat as much food as they want. And if so will it lead to starvation? Because of the population?

Choices, should people be able to choose how to live their life or should the government?

An example of the people's attitude towards choices: quote: "Any way Lilly-billy", father



and they choose one out of  
fifty letters (which is the  
best for you) and would  
be presented to you at the  
the yearly ceremony in  
December.

If you wanted a mate  
you would have to give  
it <sup>up</sup> again but this time  
it is a more lengthy take  
process. At some times take  
years for the committee  
to decide <sup>on</sup> and approve  
a mate. The process is  
very complicated. The deposition  
energy level, intelligence, and  
interest of the two people  
have to correspond and  
interact perfectly.

But they don't know  
anything like their life and  
no choice and even if  
they didn't they could  
change it!

### Response

I think that in the  
Giver some of these  
choices are good and some  
are bad. For example...

(3)

I like the rule about the bikes and how there is no pollution except for a few buses and airplanes. But I don't like that you only get you a bike when you become a year old. I think that the child and the parents should discuss and decide when the child should get his or her bike.

If I had the choice of <sup>or</sup> living in the society of The Given or the present society I would choose the society of the present because as I have indicated there is a good side to the rules and a bad side and when I studied these rules I found more bad rules than good rules and so therefore I choose to stay in the present society.

### Relating

I am going to relate The Given to a story that my school's librarian

we didn't do anything wrong  
"Because we are different" her  
mother replied. different than what? Please  
detail.

This relates to The Giver  
because that family had  
no choice but to destroy the  
evidence that they were  
different or go to jail

Now I am going to  
relate The Giver to some  
of my personal experiences

In my personal experiences  
I have endured some  
experiences related to  
the issue of choices. For  
example... I did not choose  
to do this report but I  
had to to get a good grade.

I do not choose to have  
a bath every night but my  
mom forces me to.

I do not choose to go to  
bed at 9:00 o'clock but I  
have to.

But these are very small  
cases of not being able to

choose (compared to the Given).  
? { There are much larger cases,  
world wide cases. For  
example..... in India there  
are a lot of prearranged  
marriages.

Artists and authors try  
to paraphrase these world  
wide topics into pictures,  
paintings and books to  
try to get the message  
across but even if they  
did there would still  
be countless more to  
solve.