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Literacies and Three Women's On-Going Stories to Shift Identities: A Narrative Inquiry

By

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Abstract

This study is a narrative inquiry. I am a narrative inquirer. By this I mean I think about and study experience narratively. Throughout the inquiry I thought about experience narratively while following a recursive, reflexive process which allowed me to move between telling, retelling and reliving of stories while engaging alongside relationships. The participants and I created a variety of field texts and then moved to interim and finally research texts. I used the commonplaces of temporality, sociality and place which afforded me a conceptual framework to inquire into, and write about, our stories of experience.

What you will read in the following pages is a narrative. It includes my narrative beginnings; the stories of my experiences which brought me to my research puzzle and helped me to construct my personal, practical and social justifications for the study. Over time, and as I inquired into my narrative beginnings, I understood I wanted to deepen understandings of how literacies less than a woman desires shapes her stories to live by, her identities. I also wanted to understand how and if shifts in literacies would influence identities. Therefore, this study involved an intervention carried out over 6 months. The participants and I met 3 times per week for 90 minute. During this time I tutored the women in English Language Arts in efforts to improve their literacies. There were two participants; two women for whom English was the language of instruction at school and who knew and named themselves as wanting to improve their literacies.

Before beginning the tutoring we engaged in one on one research conversations where the women shared stories from early school and home landscapes. We did this in efforts to know and name their identity threads. We then began tutoring. Throughout the tutoring and for a year following the completion of the tutoring we met once a month for research conversations. During

these conversations I asked the women to share stories of how the tutoring was influencing their lives. They told me stories of who they were and who they were struggling to become.

In my efforts to cleave to our shared experiences I have written narrative accounts for each of us. These accounts tell remembered stories and they tell stories of our shared, lived experiences. In laying our stories side by side, I pulled narrative threads which reverberated across the accounts. The first thread was the importance of living alongside relationships as we struggled to shift our identities while maintaining narrative coherence. Next, was the importance of inquiring into stories from our early, pre-reflective landscapes because they were continually shaping and reshaping the relational space. A third thread was the importance of place in our efforts to shift our identities and the final thread was the ongoing efforts to live, retell and relive our stories to live by.

In the final chapter I noted the significance of this work and I also outlined wonders which continue to linger with me. This dissertation is a story of hope because these two remarkable women never once gave up their dreams or their efforts to know and name themselves as literate. This study foregrounds the voices and the stories of two women and their struggles to know themselves as literate.

Acknowledgements

This work is complete. Having recently defended it, I returned to my new home in northern Manitoba where I work as an English Language Arts teacher and as a vice principal. Increasingly I am referred to as Doctor J and one young man calls me, Mrs. Doctor Jack-Malik. I tell you this in my efforts to share an understanding which increasingly is becoming part of my way of knowing and being in the world; identities and experiences are complex and intertwined. Perhaps then they are one or perhaps they are both, stories in the midst. Struggling towards this gloriously educative way of knowing and being was a work in progress. I did not come to it on my own; rather I struggled alongside many gifted teachers and friends. I am and will be forever grateful for their willingness to enter into alongside relationships with me. This list is long and I fear I shall leave off a friend and in so doing offend. In efforts to include I offer this photograph as a reflection of my embodied gratitude to each of you for staying the course of our friendship. I hope my living will always foreground the relational and create spaces where we wonder about who we might become such that together our lives are more.



Dr. J. (2007)

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Situating My Research Puzzle Expanding Wonders and Worries about Literacies and Identities	1
Research Puzzle.....	4
I Begin	7
Complex Stories: Moving Beyond Reading and Writing as an Autonomous List of Skills to Be Mastered	8
Sam Asks: Questions of Identities	14
Chapter Two: Constructing a Conceptual Framework: Introduction	20
Narrative Constructs of Identity: An Overview	24
My Understanding of Narrative Constructions of Identity	40
Chapter Three: Methodology	41
The Study: Conceptual Ground	43
Finding Participants.....	47
Coming Alongside.....	50
Beginning the Study	52
Ethics	52
Field Texts	55
Field Text to Research Texts.....	58
The Ongoing Process of Composing Research Texts	64
Chapter Four: A Phone Call Which Led to Meeting Edith.....	65
Edith's Narrative of Experience	65
Informal Determination of: Reading, Writing, Spelling and Comprehension Levels	67
Edith Begins to Tell Stories	70
Early Stories of Family and School.....	71
Edith Attends High School.....	76
After High School.....	81
Edith is a Mother	82
Edith and Our Study	83
Moments of Tension as Opportunities to Other Ways of Knowing.....	84
A Second Tension	106

Deepening Understandings of What it Means to Compose a Life With Literacies Less Than One Desires: Edith Talks About the Pictures She Took	113
The Signs in the Mall	113
The Little House	114
The Shoe Picture.....	115
The Wall Mural	117
Edith's Dog.....	118
Hummingbird Picture	119
Chapter Five: Carefully Selecting the Format(s) to Re-Present	120
Reader's Key	120
Reflecting Upon our Initial Research Conversations (November 16 and 17, 2010).....	124
Looking Back: Bella Re-stories our Shared Experiences.....	130
Hard Endured Stories: Bella's Landscapes.....	137
Hard Endured Story # 1.	137
Inquiring into Hard Endured Story #1	137
Hard Endured Story #2.	139
Inquiring into Hard Endured Story #2 March, 2011	140
Hard Endured Story #3	141
Inquiring into Hard Story # 3.....	142
Temporal Shifting	142
Hard Endured Story #4	142
Bella Inquires into Hard Story #4	143
Sandra Inquires into Hard Story #4	143
Chapter Six: Stories Which Shaped and are My Identities.....	145
Inquiring Into These Fond Memories.....	151
Stories from the Early Landscapes of Home and School.....	155
Stories from the Early Landscapes	156
Teaching Stories	162
Study Stories: As We Prepared and Waited.....	170
From Bus Driver to Crew Member	171
Bella and Edith's Told Stories	176

Chapter 7: Spinning Jean’s Kaleidoscope A Metaphor for Experiencing Uniqueness	181
Re-Reading for Narrative Threads	183
Four Narrative Threads	184
Narrative Resonances Across The Accounts.....	186
Three Individual Narrative Accounts and the Accounts as a Set.....	187
The First Narrative Thread: Spinning the Accounts Together	188
Spinning Bella into the Accounts.....	190
Spinning Sandra into the Narrative:	192
The Second Narrative Thread: Struggles to Shift Our Stories to Live By	194
A Third Narrative Thread: The Importance of Inquiring into Early, Pre-reflective, Primordial Landscapes	203
Sunlight Makes Visible the Final Narrative Thread.....	207
Summary Thoughts	218
Chapter 8: I Care Passionately	220
Reflecting: A Look Back.....	221
Alongside Relationships.....	221
On The Complexities and Shaping Influences of Early Stories to Live By.....	226
A Look Forward	229
Canadian Literacy Levels.....	230
Literacy Programs	230
Looking to the Larger Body of Research Where This Work is Situated	233
References	236

Chapter One: Situating My Research Puzzle Expanding Wonders¹ and Worries about Literacies² and Identities³

Over the past 20 years I regularly listened to colleagues, particularly women, share stories of when they were little girls, playing school with their dolls and or younger siblings. They spoke about knowing they would grow up to be teachers. I am not that type of teacher. I never dreamed of teaching, nor do I have any recollections of playing school, with dolls or friends. For the most part I disliked school and in particular, I loathed high school. I did, however, spend thousands of pleasurable hours in the local, municipal pool. In that pool, I learned to swim and eventually I learned to teach others to swim. In spite of my eventual swimming instructor status, it took me three summers to pass the Beginner Red Cross badge, because I was terrified of deep water. I remember my first summer in the class. I was the youngest child. I was hopeful I would easily pass into the Junior Red Cross class; I did not. At the end of the two weeks, with check marks beside every skill, except unassisted treading in deep water, my mother reenrolled me for another two weeks. My only reprieve from the three summers of repeated Beginner Red Cross swimming lessons was the two weeks of family vacation. By the time I did pass, I was the oldest child in the class.

Later when I became a swimming instructor, I was keenly interested in children and adults, who were frightened of water. With young children it was often the act of submerging one's face that presented an insurmountable challenge while many adults were terrified of the

¹ In this document I use the word wonders as a noun to mean: musing, thinking over, pondering, conjecture and speculation, meanings which are related to the verb to wonder. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) made similar use of the word when they wrote about research puzzles.

² I am mindful of my word choice, literacies and not literacy. Using the plural form is my effort to set this work apart from notions of literacy as an autonomous set of reading and writing skills to be mastered and to align it with notions of multiple literacies (Gee, 1996, Street, 1995, Collins, 1995) where literacies include consideration of personal, social, cultural and temporal elements which shape and re-shape one's literacies and one's identities.

³ I consistently use identities because I understand, "stories to live by are multiple, fluid, shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living" (Clandinin et al, 2006, p. 9).

deep end because they were unable to place their feet securely on the floor of the pool. Today I wonder if perhaps my interest in these students grew out of my own experiences with learning to swim in deep water. I am not, therefore, an educator who can share childhood stories of teacher play; however, I am a educator, who has always been interested in students who struggle.

I began my career, teaching combined classes of junior and senior kindergarten. Based on a school board generated list of socio-economic criteria, the school where I worked was labelled high needs. At the time I was hired, the school was located in a division that emphasised teaching pedagogies which supported language and literacy acquisition. To this end, there were frequent workshops offered where teachers could learn best practices. I was a regular attendee. Funds were also available to purchase books and other resources, and a consultant was a phone call away. I observed children who appeared to effortlessly and happily engage in processes which allowed them to build strong foundations of phonological awareness as they began reading. Other students struggled with the range of activities I created and presented. At the time, I didn't worry too much about the children who could not rhyme words, switch onset or final phonemes to make new words, or remember sound symbol relationships. I understood that kindergarten children were at the beginning of their reading journey and I imagined that in time, each child would learn to read.

More than 10 years later when I taught Language Arts in middle school, I met students who were struggling with literacies. This puzzled me. I wondered if there were links between the early struggles I observed with kindergarten children and the difficulties I was now observing with middle school children. Mostly though, I focussed my wonders on finding ways to help students remediate their deficiencies. I began to attend professional development courses outside of Canada at schools for students with dyslexia. I spent five summer vacations engaged in

learning to which would allow me to identify and remediate dyslexia. I attended the City of Buffalo Summer Session, the Gow School for Dyslexic Boys, and the Kildonan School for Dyslexic Students. My desire to attend these courses was urgent because I was not only sensing, but also experiencing that doors of opportunity, present and future, were closed or being closed for these at risk, struggling, or learning disabled students; I wanted to help and believed I could.

Later on in my career, I left teaching in schools to open a literacy clinic to tutor students experiencing language based difficulties. I continued to be puzzled as my wonders and worries broadened and deepened. Increasingly, I understood and observed two things. First, some students were not learning to read, write, comprehend and spell fluently; I wondered if they ever would. Thinking about these students, my questions became forward looking. Specifically, I wondered what it might mean over the course of a lifetime if one did not acquire reading and writing fluency. These wonderings allowed me to think beyond literacy as a list of skills to be mastered or remediated. Moving away from the checklist of skills, I began to experience and puzzle over the resilience and desires of many students. Frequently, students arrived at tutoring sessions knowing themselves as less able than their classmates. Many were shy and timid about trying once more. Some were angry and defiant; they knew there was nothing they could do to improve their reading abilities because they knew themselves as stupid. Experiencing the students' frustrations and the parents' worries, we tentatively began. We worked to remediate weaknesses, used assistive technology and advocated for school-based accommodations. Throughout, I was increasingly attentive to the stories of home and school which students were sharing with me. Slowly, over time and with plenty of stops, starts and plateaus, students began to improve their literacies. In the midst of this skill improvement, I noted and listened as parents commented on how the children were more confident, happier and more willing to do school

work. I wondered if these observations and comments about a student's improving sense of self were linked to their improving literacies.

Tutoring experiences presented many different vantage points; my wonders broadened. I began to think about those students and families who could not afford to pay for tutoring and I understood literacies as an issue of social justice. I also wondered about students who received intensive tutoring but were not developing fluency. Moreover, I thought deeply about the stories I heard when I was invited to attend annual school-based reviews of particular students. I often attempted to hold these school-based stories in my mind, alongside stories the students and parents were sharing and alongside the experiences I was having whilst tutoring. I routinely returned to wondering how these stories influenced who the student was, who she⁴ was permitted to be, and who she might become. I also wondered how I was complicit in the stories being told of students on and off school landscapes. Furthermore, I thought deeply about which stories the teachers, tutor, students and parents valued, devalued, and sometimes silenced.

Research Puzzle⁵

When I began my doctoral studies, I drew these experiences forward. They influenced, shaped, and re-shaped the courses I took, the reading I did, my thinking and my participation within The Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development (CRTED). Through this work, my research puzzle was imagined up, engaged in and written about. It had three foci. First, I wanted to deepen understandings of how literacies influenced, shaped and re-shaped the identities of women, with literacies less than they desired. I wanted to do this by listening and attending to the women's stories of school, home, work and family. Like Silko (1996), I

⁴ I have consistently used female pronouns because the participants and I are female. I have also done so to avoid using he/she.

⁵ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote, "narrative inquires are always composed around a particular wonder, a research puzzle" (p. 124) and "as an inquirer reads and rereads her field texts on the way to composing research texts, the phenomenon, the what of the inquiry, is among the topics that press on the inquirer" (p. 125).

understand, “the web of memories and ideas ... create identity” (p. 43). Moreover, I understand these stories as funds of knowledge (Moll, 2010), therefore attention to them affords deeper understandings of life lived. Next, I wanted to attend to shifts in identities which might occur through 6 months of intensive tutoring and ongoing research conversations. Finally, I wondered how I, a maker of curriculum⁶, would influence the relational space and how the participants would shape it. By asking the women to talk about the tutoring, I was afforded opportunities to wonder about my pedagogical practices and the understandings which gave birth to them. Vinz (1997) reminded me to think deeply about the “gaps and spaces through which to (re)member ourselves as we examine the principles behind our practice” (p. 139).

All of these wonders are tethered to the cornerstone of my research puzzle; puzzles about identities and possibilities/struggles for identities to shift. From the beginning I have consistently leaned into the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1999) and their narrative notion of stories to live by. They wrote:

Narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed entity . . . or they may continue to grow and change. They may even be, indeed, almost certainly are, multiple depending on the life situations in which one finds oneself. (p. 95)

⁶ Connelly and Clandinin (1992) wrote, “We began by suggesting that curriculum might be viewed as an account of teachers’ and students’ lives together in schools and classrooms... It is a view in which the teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process and in which teacher, learners, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (p. 392).

I have also been repeatedly reminded by Roy (2007)⁷, when she said, “I tell it (a story) not as an ideologue who wants to put one absolutist ideology against another, but as a storyteller who wants to share her way of seeing”.

I wanted to share our⁸ experiences because I know them as affordances for deeper understandings of how identities are influenced when one lives with literacies less than one desires⁹. Moreover, because I understand that paper and the symbols which appear on it remain only that until the reader engages the standardized symbols with sufficient accuracy such that a two way transactional relationship is enacted (Rosenblatt, 1978), I wanted to record our experiences in a written format, in part, because I wanted to contribute to research conversations where identities and literacies were the topic of conversation. I am aware of an irony, as my study involved women with literacies less than they desired and while they made significant progress in their reading levels, I suspect some of the text will be inaccessible or painfully accessible with dictionary and or trusted guide. In part I attempted to mitigate this tension. I did this through the negotiation of the narrative accounts (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). As I was writing the narrative accounts I met regularly with the participants in my efforts to clarify meaning and to ask further questions. Once I had drafts of the accounts I brought them to the research conversations. Sitting next to me at my desk, we read the accounts, taking turns, page by page. I invited response. As you read the narrative accounts you will notice a series of footnotes. These notes reflect the responses the participants offered as we read. Furthermore, in

⁷ Arundhati Roy is an Indian novelist, essayist and activist. Her novel, *The God of Small Things*, won the Booker Prize in 1997.

⁸ This “our” refers to the women in the study, Bella, Edith, and me.

⁹ I struggled to select words to describe how the participants identified themselves. In the end I chose “literacies less than they desire”. I carefully selected these words because they speak to the participants’ desire to shift how they know and name themselves in term of literacies. Moreover, this phrase indicates the women began the study with some literacies. Finally, I selected this phrase because it hints at the complexities of the notion of literacies.

my efforts to manage the irony of the issue of accessibility I came to rely on Heilbrun's (1988) idea that stories come to us through multiple mediums:

What matters is that lives do not serve as models; only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (p. 37)

From this quote I understand this text is the story of the journey I shared with the participants. I am hopeful readers, including the participants who co-composed their narrative accounts, will know it as a new narrative. I am hopeful of this because, we can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. This work offers other ways of knowing women with limited literacies and other ways of knowing about the intersections of literacies and identities.

I Begin

I have been puzzling over, thinking about and experiencing literacies as shaping influences, as I struggled to compose a life, for as long as I have known myself as a fluent reader. In this first section, I present two stories which shaped, and continue to shape, who I am as a literacy educator. This is purposeful in my desire to carve out a context for the work I have chosen, specifically the personal, practical and social justifications as to why this work is important and meaningful (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007). As a narrative inquirer, I want to be clear as to why this work is meaningful and important. Moreover, I have done this to demonstrate my relationship to, and interest in, the study; to offer stories which serve to change how we think about the intersections of identities and literacies, such that I, and others wonder

about or change teaching practices; and finally, I have done this to create a space for voices and stories, which are often marginalized because they belong to women with literacies less than they desire.

Complex Stories: Moving Beyond Reading and Writing as an Autonomous List of Skills to Be Mastered

For the first few years, I worked as a kindergarten teacher and the next few, as a teacher-librarian. Much of this work focussed on teaching children to read¹⁰, write, comprehend¹¹ and spell. The first schools where I worked were located in the inner city of what was then North York, Ontario. Many of the children did not speak English as their first language, lived in the midst of limited socio-economic conditions, and had recently arrived in Canada. The children I taught, and learned from, lived complex lives and, while I might not have been able to articulate the complexity, I did experience it as I taught in classrooms and libraries, as I met students and their families and as I learned to wait while translators translated parent-teacher interviews. I wondered about students, particularly those who were experiencing difficulties with English language literacies. My growing appreciation of their complex lives meant my wonderings were broad in that they reached to consider experiences from school, home (Canada), home (country of birth) and social contexts. Moreover, I frequently wondered how I was influencing what a classroom of new immigrants, many of whom were refugees, understood about school, teaching,

¹⁰ Chartier (1994) wrote “reading, by definition, is rebellious and vagabond. Readers use infinite numbers of subterfuges to procure prohibited books, to read between the lines, and to subvert lessons imposed on them” (p. viii). I appreciate this description because I understand it to mean that reading is so much more than comprehension and/or decoding.

¹¹ Chartier (1994) when describing the meaning given to written works, wrote, “works—even the greatest works, especially the greatest works—have no stable, universal, fixed meaning. They are invested with plural and mobile significations that are constructed in the encounter between a proposal and a reception. The meanings attributed to their forms and their themes depend upon the areas of competence or the expectations of the various publics that take hold of them. To be sure, the creators (or the ‘powers’ . . .) always aspire to pin down meaning their meaning and proclaim the correct interpretation, the interpretation that ought to constrain reading. . . . But without fail, reception invents, shifts about, distorts” (pp. ix–x).

learning, Canadians and most importantly about themselves. Midway through my first year of teaching, my wonderings grew broader.

I remember distinctly the morning after the Montreal Massacre, December 7, 1989. I had been teaching for barely 3 months, I was pregnant with my first child and I was utterly distraught knowing the gunman had sought out and targeted women. As I rode my bike in the cold across Lawrence Avenue, I recalled a recent staff meeting where the principal suggested we check our emotional baggage at the school door before entering. Riding face into the wind with salty tears sopping my cheeks, I knew my emotions would enter the school with me. I did my best to compose myself before opening the classroom door to allow the children to enter directly from the playground. We went about the business of beginning our day and then settled upon the carpet for our opening activities; part of this routine included the children sharing news.

Five-year-old Alessandro¹², son of a political refugee from South America, put up his hand and slowly began telling our class (junior and senior kindergarten, 4- and 5-year-olds) about the massacre. His father, who had been a professor in their country, shared the story with him. Alessandro, in his perfect, commanding English, told the class how the man with the gun wanted to shoot girls and how his father told him this was a very bad thing. Sitting on a rocking chair, I listened, weeping. The children turned to me. I felt they wanted confirmation of the story; I was incapable. Three girls—Shini from Sri Lanka and Hope and Jubilee, identical twins from Barbados—stood up and embraced me. Shini put her head in my lap and wrapped her arms round my pregnant self; the twins draped their arms around my neck. I remember tiny, twig like, twin arms stretching to reach and hook together on the other side. I let them soothe me; I let them

¹² Pseudonyms have been used to protect the students' identities.

linger. Alessandro looked to me and asked, “Sandra¹³, is what Poppi said true?” and I replied, “Yes.”

Later that day as I rode home, I reflected on our morning. I knew the children had experienced me in ways which were other than what they were accustomed to; many children had cried in our classroom. I had not, until this particular morning. In response, three girls physically reached out to me, embracing me. I received their hugs, which I interpreted as unabashed love. In so doing, my emotional turmoil was reduced. Thinking about these little girls, I also thought about the mothers in Montreal who would never again hug their daughters or be hugged as I had been, and I wondered about the child who was alive and growing within me. I wanted a way to thread together these three things: the children in my classroom, the child within me, and the young women in Montreal who had been cut down because they were women. Coherence did not manifest as an option.

Over time, I returned to this memory. I knew my teacher stories had been influenced because I began considering the possibility and the importance of loving other people’s children, a consideration which lingered for many years. When I began teaching, I positioned myself and I was positioned as teacher. In my understanding, this positioning was narrow in that it did not include the possibility of loving relationships with students. Lugones (1987) describes loving women across racial and cultural divides. She leaned into the work of Frye (1983) and her notion of arrogant perception, and added her idea of playful “world” travelling¹⁴. Lugones wrote, “there is a complex failure of love in the failure to identify with another woman, the failure to see oneself in other women who are quite different from oneself” (p. 7). When the three little girls

¹³ As a beginning teacher and in consultation with a beginning principal, I invited the children to call me Sandra and so they did.

¹⁴ Lugones (1987) described world travelling as a “... skillful, creative, rich, enriching and, given certain circumstances, as a loving way of being and living” (p.3). She argued learning to travel to each other’s worlds was an act of love.

reached out to me, I experienced them as willing to see me and my suffering and as a result I did not feel alone. Moreover, this experience afforded me opportunities to wonder about the places where our lives intersected outside of the mandated provincial curriculum. I had these wonders because I was keenly aware the children had tended to my emotional well-being and I was better for it. The children taught me a lesson about the importance of the relational, one I continue to learn. The motherless twins Hope and Jubilee, and Shini, the daughter of a Tamil fighter who moved regularly between Sri Lanka and his wife and five children in Toronto, had stories very different than mine and yet they recognized suffering and responded to it in a way which served to open future, educative tellings, retellings, and relivings of stories¹⁵. This was the case because this story lingered within me; I returned to it, I told it and then listened as friends and colleagues responded to it. In the early tellings, I described what the children had done, however as time passed I found myself including story bits which reflected my gratitude for what the children had afforded me. Today I believe I shared and continue to share this story in my efforts to deepen my understandings of the experience and because I now know this story as a story from which other stories grew. Specifically this story allowed me, through time, to think deeply about loving children outside of my family.

The complex lives these small children were living and had in part endured¹⁶ had a familiarity to them in that they called forward what I saw as some of my own early mis-educative¹⁷ (Dewey, 1938) stories. Living alongside the children in our shared classroom, memories of early, endured dysfunction were called forward. My resulting desire was “to create

¹⁵ Connelly & Clandinin (2006) used four terms to “structure the process of self-narration”. Lived stories are those we live. Told stories are those we tell. Retold stories are those used “to interpret lives as told in different ways, to imagine different possibilities” (p. 478). To relive stories is “to live out the new person” (p. 478).

¹⁶ I use the word endured to indicate a child most often has no choice. She is dependent on the stories of the adults with whom she lives; therefore, she endures stories, educative and mis-educative.

¹⁷ Dewey (1938) termed experiences as educative or mis-educative based on a distinction he made “between the inherent values of different experiences” (p. 35). Moreover, Dewey wrote, “any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience” (p. 25).

spaces in which children could tell diverse stories to live by other than ones shaped by narrow plotlines” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007, p. 25). As I sat in weekly staff meetings and listened to, and participated in, conversations which confidently predicted bleak academic and social futures for the students of our school, I increasingly understood we were privileged teachers with limited understandings of the complexities of students’ lives. I don’t ever recall imagining futures for my students which included post-secondary education. It is not that the children were insufficiently bright; rather, it was the complexities of their lives which allowed me to know them as fortunate if they graduated high school. I was a member of an almost exclusively White, middle class, female staff charged with the responsibility of teaching children who were often hungry, tired, unkempt, abused, neglected, speaking English as a second, third, and sometimes a fourth language, with parent(s) who were also struggling to compose their lives. In the midst of these complexities, many children came to school eager to learn. What did we know of the struggles these children and their families encountered on and off school landscapes and what did we care to know? I knew little and did little to deepen my understandings.

There were moments, however, when I struggled against the predicated, bleak future stories because when I reflected upon stories from my early landscapes, I understood school failure was not the only possible outcome. When I looked at, and thought about, the students I taught, I saw few similarities between my early years and the lives many students endured because I was never hungry, unkempt or fearful there might not be a home to return to at the end of the day. Moreover, I spoke English as my first language. Notwithstanding my dislike of school, I was sufficiently successful such that I passed each grade. Nevertheless, some of the experiences my students endured resonated with me, the adult child of a parent who abused

alcohol. Perhaps my early stories made me desperate to cheer for these children and their families such that I was sometimes able to imagine future educative stories.

It never occurred to me to challenge a system which permitted children to live in abject poverty; however, I did feel a need to do something. I focussed on teaching children to read, thinking it the most important task. From today's vantage point, I understand my highly focussed efforts to ensure each child read were grounded in a knowing I had constructed as a child. This knowing understood books as vehicles of transport to worlds of otherwise; said transport was particularly useful when one was forced into mis-educative plotlines, including academic failure. I desperately wanted each child to have access to this type of transport. This desire has not diminished over the years and therefore I know it as part of my personal justification for this study. I am capable of and I desire to advocate for individuals marginalized by plotlines of academic failure. Today, I wonder how Alessandro, Shini, Hope, and Jubilee storied this experience and I also wonder who they are becoming as adults. At the time, these children allowed me to interrupt my teacher stories, such that I wondered what was possible in a classroom; specifically, I wondered who was teaching whom, and what I valued?

A second story follows which helped carve out the context for my interest in and justifications for a study about identities, identity shifts, and literacies. This story highlights the practical, social and theoretical justifications for my study in that I am hopeful it will add to ongoing research conversations seeking to influence thinking about how we teach literacies and how instruction is shaping the identities of students, families and teachers. If we treat literacies as an autonomous set of skills to be mastered, then we are not awake to the opportunity to think about the ongoing, forward and backward, inward and outward¹⁸ links between literacies,

¹⁸ Clandinin & Connelly (1994) described the four directions of inquiry: inward (internal conditions: hopes, feelings, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions); outward (existential conditions: the environment), forward and

identities, and identity shifts. Moreover, if the stories on the professional knowledge landscapes¹⁹ are only, or primarily, about skills to be mastered, then the opportunity to awaken or remain awake to literacies as identity-shaping and influencing is lessened or lost. Therefore, this study is important because it allows readers “to think about the larger social and educational issues [of] the study” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007, p. 25).

Sam Asks: Questions of Identities

In the summer of 2001 I tutored a child who completed first grade without learning the names of, or sounds produced by any of the phonemes²⁰. The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8: Language (revised, 2006) states that at the end of Grade 1 a child will “use knowledge of words and cueing systems to read fluently” (p. 40). Sam was not able to do this; his mother and I were worried for him and therefore we were working aggressively in 60- minute tutoring sessions, three times a week to remediate his weaknesses. One afternoon, Sam looked across the table and said, “Sander, are you a real teacher?”²¹ Unsure of what he meant, I asked him and so began a conversation where I found myself describing the trajectory and circumstances of my career. When I finished, Sam smiled and said, “I get it Sander, you were a real teacher when you taught at real school, but you’re not a real teacher now because you work at home; you’re a helper.” Once again, uncertain of what my clever young charge was getting at, I asked him to explain. “You know, you play these games with me so I can learn my letters and that helps my real

backward (temporal). I am mindful of these directional words and their meanings as I think about the intersections of identities, identity shifts and literacies.

¹⁹ Clandinin & Connelly (1995) coined the term professional knowledge landscapes to describe and understand contexts. They wrote: “understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of people, places and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relations among people, places, and things, we see it both as an intellectual and a moral landscape” (pp. 4–5).

²⁰ A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language.

²¹ All of the quotations from the tutoring session are taken from a digital recording of the session (July, 2001: Wingate Literacy Clinic).

teacher, and it helps me because when I go back to school, I will be able to do my work. I'll be able to read and that will be really good for me and my real teacher" (personal communication, July 2001). Later that evening, I thought again about what Sam had asked. I was particularly interested in how he viewed me as not a real teacher, and how he viewed the work we were doing as games to be played. I want to consider Sam's framing of me as not a real teacher and his idea that the curriculum was game playing through the lens of identity—both Sam's and mine.

I understand Sam's question as an opening which now allows me to appreciate that many of my questions were grounded in my identity as a teacher within the various contexts where I worked. Over a 20-year career, I moved progressively away from a traditional school setting. I began in North York, then Hamilton, then a small independent school and, most recently, I transitioned to private practice, working as a literacy clinician.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) wrote about two "fundamentally different places, the in-classroom place and the out-of-classroom place" in the professional knowledge landscapes of school (p. 151). These two different places were described as follows. Out-of-classroom:

a place filled with knowledge funnelled into the school system for the purpose of altering teachers' and children's classroom lives It is filled with other people's visions of what is right for children. Researchers, policy makers, senior administrators and others, using various implementation strategies, push research findings, policy statements, plans, and improvements schemes and so on down what we call the conduit into this out-of-classroom place on the professional knowledge landscape. (p. 25)

In-classroom was described as:

Classrooms are, for the most part, safe places, generally free from scrutiny, where teachers are free to live stories of practice. These stories are essentially secret ones.

Furthermore, when these secret lived stories are told, they are, for the most part, told to other teachers in other secret places. When teachers move out of their classrooms onto the out-of-classroom place on the landscape, they often live and tell cover stories, stories in which they portray themselves as expert, certain characters whose teacher stories fit within the acceptable range of the story of school being lived in school. (p. 25)

Considering the various schools I worked at, I began to think that each step taken had been a move away from schools, which were made up of both in- and out- of -classroom places and one towards a place where I could attend to the in-classroom places: “safe places where teachers lived out their stories of who they were and who they were becoming as they interacted with children” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p.25). Moreover, I see my movement as steps taken away from out-of-classroom places which are “prescriptive, professional places shared with other teachers and as places where teachers were expected to hold certain, expert knowledge” (p. 25). Furthermore, I now story my movement away from a school setting as a movement from teacher to tutor in that I am no longer confronted with a classroom of children and all the resulting responsibilities. I tutor one-on-one or in small groups. When I went into private practice I could not have articulated that I was acting upon a desire to focus my attention on the in-classroom place, however, I now believe that is precisely what I wanted.

Thinking about it today, I understand the out-of-classroom places exhausted me to the point where I began to consider a different career. Not ready to leave the financial comfort of school work, however exhausted by the demands, I accepted a position at an independent school where part of my assignment was to work with students who were struggling. As I got to know

these students, they shared stories of accomplishments which occurred in off-school places. At the same time, their parents expressed grave concerns about their child's academic performance. Listening to students' stories of accomplishment from off-school places intermingled with stories of parental concern, coupled with my own observations, afforded me opportunities to wonder how literacies were influencing identities. Moreover, from student and parent stories, I understood how the coding of *learning disabled*, *struggling* or *at risk* left little room to attend to relationships between parents, students, and teachers because it put the child in a clearly defined box. How, I wondered, could a student move from the box and shift their identities if their stories were continually understood through the minuscule and often misunderstood lens of learning disabled, struggling, or at risk? These wonders then became part of the practical justification for my work.

Sam's question also allowed me to think about my identity as a maker of curriculum. From Schwab's (1978) four curriculum commonplaces: learners, milieu, subject matter, and teacher, Sam's comments about game playing focussed my thinking on subject matter. When I arrived at the University of Alberta, I thought the work I was doing was pre-curricular, in that I was helping to prepare children to engage in their studies by teaching them how to read, comprehend and write. In this sense, I saw the work I was doing as a catalyst for the child's hoped-for success with the provincially mandated curriculum. I no longer believe this to be the case. Relying on Clandinin and Connelly's (1988) notion of curriculum "as something that is experienced in situations" (p. 6), I understand Sam and I were engaged in much more than learning to read. It was more than me following a list of outcomes as stated in provincial curriculum documents. When Sam shared with me how he was storying the tutoring and how he imagined himself when he returned to school in September, I began to appreciate the complexity

of what we were engaged in. From Sam's comments, I now understand he wanted to read; he wanted to be able to do his work both for himself and for his teacher. Sam wanted to be successful and to be seen as successful. Learning to read by the end of Grade 1 is a mandated education story in Ontario and Sam understood that neither he nor his teacher had storied him as a reader. Appreciating this, I am able to conceive of the work I do as more than remediation of weaknesses. For Sam, learning to read allowed him an opportunity to story himself as able, both in his own eyes and in his teacher's eyes. Sam's story demonstrates the fluidity of identity and the possibility for identity shifts. From these understandings, I appreciate the social and educational justifications which my work addresses.

Today as I think about tutoring Sam, and as I listen to recordings of our sessions, I am mindful of two things. First, I routinely hear myself utilizing the following strategies: running records; ongoing checks for comprehension; tracking his improving subject specific vocabulary; working aggressively to develop his phonological awareness; and attending to the skills and strategies he used as he read and wrote. Next, I understand that by inquiring into the stories Sam shared in the midst of the tutoring, I was able to begin a process where I shifted my stories away from a singular focus on skill remediation to an inclusion of identities—Sam's and mine. Tutoring Sam over the summer of 2001 was part of an ongoing, slow, and frequently stalled awakening to stories of identities which were embedded in the tutoring.

Finally, over the course of my doctoral studies as I shifted contexts, my practical justification came to include a desire for spaces where students work collaboratively and in support of each other. This was, in part, because in the fourth and final year of my studies I became involved with a writing group. Working with two colleagues, Sonia Houle and Ted Paszek, we met weekly to support each other as we wrote dissertations. In coming alongside

these fellow researchers and writers, I was challenged to think more deeply and to be aware of my assumptions. Butler-Kisber (2010) noted, “review [of] what is emerging in the inquiry can provide important and different perspectives for thinking about what is transpiring” (p. 16). This is precisely what occurred, the writing group conversations gave me experience with student spaces which were supportive, collegial and hinted at what might be. I now see this as another justification for my study, because I can imagine student spaces where support, encouragement and deep thought are the dominant story.

In summary, my “relationship to, and interest in” (Clandinin, Pushor, & Murray Orr, 2007, p. 25) this inquiry is grounded in personal, practical, and social justifications and therefore the work is important. By inquiring into told stories from early school and home landscapes and by coming alongside the participants through 6 months of tutoring and research conversations I deepened understandings of how literacies shape and re-shape identities.

Chapter Two: Constructing a Conceptual Framework: Introduction

My²² research puzzle was driven by curiosities and questions about identities and literacies and how they are shaped and re-shaped over time and within various contexts. I am particularly interested in women and literacies. I am curious about literacies, identities, and identity shifts because of what I perceive to be the potential they hold

to generate a new relation between a human being and her environment—her life, community, world—one that makes possible a new way of dealing with them, and thus eventually creates a new kind of experienced objects, not more real than those which preceded but more significant, and less overwhelming and oppressive. (Dewey, 1981b, p. 175) in (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 39)

My research focussed on the identities and the identity-shifting experiences of three women, two of whom self-identified as having literacies less than they desired. The third woman is me, the researcher/tutor. I inquired into our told identity stories and how we came to know and understand our literacies and how this knowing is storied as we composed our lives in various contexts. Moreover, I inquired into how identities shifted through the experience of literacy tutorials. I did this by living alongside the women and attending to their stories to live by (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999) as they were lived, told and relived through and after literacy tutorials. This was purposeful in three ways. First, it allowed me to deepen and broaden understandings of identity-making experiences of women with limited literacies within the context of their life stories and across a lifespan. Next, it afforded glimpses into the identity-shifting efforts of three women within the context of teaching and learning English Language

²² The issue of pronouns and ownership of this work has evoked an ongoing tension in me. On the one hand, I appreciate I must claim this work as my own and yet on the other hand, I know none of it is possible without the contributions of many.

Arts. Finally, I inquired into my experiences as a maker of curriculum²³ in an effort to be attentive to how my teacher stories to live by shifted through the experiences.

This study is a narrative inquiry. It is a study of human experience. It uses a narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), therefore it is ontologically grounded in extrapolations from Dewey's (1938) theories on the nature of experience and by Connelly and Clandinin's (2006) notion that "people shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their pasts in terms of these stories" (p. 375). Eisner (1999) noted "experience is slippery; it is difficult to operationalize; it eludes factual descriptions of manifest behaviour" (p. ix). Dewey's theories of experience address the difficulties noted by Eisner because his ideas include considerations for the intersection(s) of interaction²⁴, continuity²⁵ and situation between a learner and that which is learned. Simultaneous consideration of these intersections is important because it affords "narrative ways of thinking about phenomena" (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 36). Dewey (1981) wrote:

In an experience, things and events belonging to the world, physical and social, are transformed through the human context they enter, while the live creature is changed and developed through its intercourse with things previously lived. (p. 251)

²³ Clandinin & Connelly (1992) wrote "teachers and students live out a curriculum; teachers do not transmit, implement, or teach a curriculum and objectives; nor are they and their students carried forward in their work and studies by a curriculum of textbooks and content, instructional methodologies, and intentions. An account of teachers' and students' lives over time is the curriculum, although intentionality, objectives, and curriculum materials do play a part" (p. 365).

²⁴ Dewey (1938) identified two criteria of experience; the first criterion was interaction. Interaction happens between an individual, objects and other people continually. An experience is always what it is because of the transactions between an individual and her environment.

²⁵ Dewey's (1938) second criterion, continuity, draws attention to how each experience carries over from earlier to later experiences, such that what one learns in one situation becomes a lens through which to experience and understand later experiences. Dewey wrote: "every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) drew on Dewey's work when they coined the commonplaces of narrative inquiry: "personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)" (p. 50). These ideas were used as narrative inquirers described experiences which unfolded through time and were influenced through time, backwards and forwards. Holding these three notions simultaneously, Clandinin and Connelly described a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, such that a study has "temporal dimensions and address(es) temporal matters; (it) focus(es) on the personal and social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and (it) occur(s) in specific places or sequence of places" (p. 50).

This Deweyan ontology of experience allowed Clandinin and Connelly (2000), to "begin with experience as expressed in lived and told stories" (p. 40). As they attended to storied lives they developed narrative conceptualizations of identities. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) wrote about how teachers' knowledge and the various contexts in which they lived, were interwoven, such that the stories they lived and told of who they were and who they were becoming were understood as identity stories. Understanding knowledge, context and identity as linked resulted in the term, "stories to live by" (p.4). Clandinin et al. (2006) described "stories to live by" as "multiple, fluid, and shifting, continuously composed and recomposed in the moment-to-moment living" (p. 9). This research then is grounded in the ontological connections between experience and narrative conceptions of identities. With Dewey's theory of experience and Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative conceptualizations of identities as my conceptual foundation, I know life to be "filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 17). Moreover, like Heilbrun (1997), and MacIntyre (1998), I understand

humans as story-telling beings; therefore our sense of self is grounded in the stories we live, tell, retell and relive.

With Dewey's (1938) ontological understandings of experience and with narrative constructs of identities, my research puzzle was conceived (imagined up²⁶), enacted, and written about in an effort to deepen understandings of the identity shaping experiences of girls/women composing their lives with literacies less than they desire. It included an intervention, a 6-month period of three 90-minute tutoring sessions per week where I was the tutor/researcher. The puzzle grew out of the work I did, and the puzzles and questions which emerged as I tutored students labelled as at risk, struggling or learning disabled. My queries and the questions I was puzzling over led me to imagine a two part study. The first intention was to understand how the women experienced their lives up to the point when the study began. And the second intention was to be attentive to shifts in identities which may have occurred through the 6 months of tutoring and follow-up conversations. In coming alongside the women as both researcher and tutor, my intention was to deepen understandings of the complexities of our lives as we lived in relation and as our stories to live by (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999) were being shaped and re-shaped. In the following section, you will read an overview of some of the work done in the area of narrative constructions of identities and identity shifts. This is purposeful because it demonstrates what I read as I struggled to construct a coherent understanding of identities and identity shifts, two cornerstones of this study. I brought these understandings to the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as I inquired into the experiences the participants and I lived and told. Moreover, the reading allowed me to appreciate how understandings have shifted over time and how there are many ideas about identities and identity shifts.

²⁶ Clandinin, Pushor, Murray Orr (2007) described a study which "unfolded through imagining, and reimagining, a reflexive and reflective back and forth as lives changed and the context changed" (p. 27).

Narrative Constructs of Identity: An Overview

The study of narrative can be tracked back as far as Aristotle; however, narrative theory emerged as a point of inquiry in the second half of the twentieth century. In terms of identity theory, this was a move away from the linear, Piagetian notions of developmental stages which saw a child construct herself and therefore her identity in a world which was inherently logical (Bidell, 1988). Piaget argued that as a child grew physically, her cognitive abilities and therefore her reasoning skills improved; this in turn led her to think increasingly abstractly as she moved through various stages. Narrative constructs of identities are otherwise because they purport humans as story-telling creatures (Heilbrun, 1988, McAdams, 1993) who live and tell stories as they make sense of the world. In what follows, I trace the development of the conceptual framework I came to understand as helpful when thinking about my research puzzle.

My understanding of narrative constructions of identity begins with Dewey's (1938) theory of experience. Dewey wrote,

every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences, [such that] . . . the continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after. (p. 35)

Moreover, Dewey argued,

we live in a world . . . of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities . . . There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience. (p. 40)

Dewey called this interaction. Other researchers, philosophers and psychologists have suggested alternate views of the identity shaping and processes. The purpose of the next section is to explore some of the work which has been done in the field of identity studies, particularly in the area of narrative constructs of identities. I begin with psychologist Erik Erikson (1970) who described a theory of identity development which hinged on one's successful movement through what he described as eight stages. His theory understands the development of identity as an individual travels through predetermined stages. Moreover, he argued, as a person increased her desire to expand her social circle, she facilitated movement through the stages. Furthermore, he believed society supports the maximum movement through, and sequencing of, the developmental stages. An individual, Erikson believed, faces significant changes to her identity; her job is to successfully resolve an identity crisis (which he understood as an opportunity) at each of the eight stages. If she does so, she will embrace the experience as a positive influence to her ego, thus enhancing future healthy development through the remaining stages. In addition, Erickson argued, progression through the eight stages was evidence of normal development. The particular stage when an individual must establish her personal identity and thereby avoid identity confusion occurred at stage five. At this stage, the adolescent assesses her strengths and weaknesses while wondering about who she is, where she came from and who she will become. Through this, the adolescent makes choices about who she is, based in part on what she believes. This implies a search and a sustained effort. When one is unwilling to engage in the work, the possibility of identity confusion, alienation, and isolation arise. Erikson's theory accounted for historical and cultural influences and at the time it gave full autonomy to the ego, believing successful resolution at each stage led to growth and mastery. Other researchers take a different view of identity development not based on stage theory.

For example, McAdams (1993), a psychologist, put forth his theory of human identity by arguing for personal myths which each of us constructs consciously or subconsciously in our efforts to create meaning and purpose in our lives. In 2001 he described his model as a

life-story model of identity, contending that people living in modern societies begin, in late adolescence and young adulthood, to construe their lives as evolving stories that integrate the reconstructed past and the anticipated future in order to provide life with semblance of unity and purpose. (p. 100)

McAdams (1993) argued the differences between people's identities are apparent in the elements of their personal myths: where they are set, the various plotlines, the characters included and excluded and the scenes, images and themes involved. He posits this range of identity-construing elements influences perception, understanding and behavior as one attempts to explain the world, self-develop, seek social direction and understand one's place in the world. Personal myths, he suggested, are considered when one perceives a discrepancy between our inner organization models and what happens to us in the world. McAdams wrote "each of us must try to comprehend the specific nature of our unique life course and personal journey if we are to know who we are and how our own life may be made most meaningful" (p. 12).

Personal myths, according to McAdams (1993), are a "patterned integration of our remembered past, perceived present and anticipated future" (p. 12). Embedded within his idea are two notions—agency and communion. By agency he was referring to personal power and achievement and by communion, he referred to intimacy and love. Depending on the type of interaction one has with agency or communion, positive or negative, one's personal myth is influenced. Moreover, he argued adolescence is a period of critical identity development because we are aware of ourselves as myth makers. From McAdams' work, I pulled forward wonderings

about the notion of agency and like Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Dewey (1938), a knowing of the importance of interaction as an individual shapes and re-shapes her identities.

Another author who contributed to my understanding of identities was Gilligan (1982). Her studies advanced human and moral development which was thematic and unique to women. In her book, *In a Different Voice*, she argued women's approach to morality is fundamentally different to that of men. Men, she argued, think in terms of rules and justice whereas women are more inclined towards foregrounding the relational and an ethic of care. In three separate studies, *The College Student Study*, *The Abortion Decision Study*, and *The Rights and Responsibilities Study*, Gilligan argued women were not inferior in their personal or moral development, but that they were different. She outlined three progressive stages of moral development: preconventional (selfishness and a focus on individual survival), conventional (selfishness to responsibility to others, such that self sacrifice is goodness), and finally post conventional (goodness to an understanding that she is a person guided by principles of nonviolence). A woman's movement through the stages, as suggested by Gilligan, is grounded in changes in her sense of self and not cognitive capacity. Her writings argued against the work of Kohlberg (1976) and his Stages of Moral Development. Gilligan's work was important because it challenged the male bias in human development theories by arguing for the need to include women's experience. Specifically she posited "that the inclusion of women's experience brings to developmental understanding a new perspective on relationships that changes the basic constructs of interpretation" (p. 173). While Gilligan's work has been criticised, it is important to note that at the time of publication, it had an impact on feminism because it challenged the idea that in order to mature, one had to develop an autonomous self and it demonstrated the inadequacy of studies which relied on interviews with predominately male subjects. Gilligan's work emphasized how

women's moral understandings were contextual, relational, and, therefore, interdependent and not an aberration from *male normal*. This work is important to my study because, in part, it gave me permission to consider research exclusively with women participants. Moreover, it was part of an ongoing shift in my identities in that it allowed me to understand and experience multiple interpretations of a single event. This was helpful because it supported my shifting stories away from binary, dichotomous understandings of either/or. Furthermore, it afforded me bridges which led towards multiple understandings of a single event. For example, in reflection years later, thinking about the little girls who reached out to me on the morning following the Montreal Massacre, I had many questions about how they might have storied the experience. I appreciated that the experience shaped us each differently. Appreciating these differences moved me deeply and excited me because it gave me room to expand my thinking, wonderings and puzzles. Moreover, it provided new layers of possible context for stories from my early landscapes, where the interests of my father and brothers were always primary.

Belenky et al. (1986), working forward from Gilligan's research, published a book entitled *Women's Ways of Knowing*. The book is organized around five epistemological perspectives which emerged as a result of a series of interviews with 135 women. Female research participants were located within a traditional source, the academy; however, the authors also included women of higher education from outside the academy. They were interested in understanding how women experience learning and how they know themselves as a result. They were particularly interested in how maternal practice might shape women's thinking about human development and the teaching relationship. We expected that by listening to women talk about mothers and mothering, we might hear themes that were especially distinctive in a woman's voice. (p. 13)

Belenky et al. argued what women know influences their perceptions of self, their knowing of the world and their views of teaching and learning. Through the five epistemological frameworks, women's view(s) of reality, knowledge, and authority are organized. Belenky et al.'s (1986) work was different from Gilligan's (1982) in that they framed their findings as ways of knowing as opposed to stages of development. The five epistemological perspectives offered were: silence (women know themselves as voiceless), received knowing (women know themselves as receivers of knowledge from experts), subjective knowing (knowledge is subjectively known; truth resides within), procedural knowing (women are invested in their learning), and constructed knowing (truth and knowledge are understood as contextual).

Throughout the interviews, Belenky et al. repeatedly heard the women speak about *finding their voices*. From the stories they heard and analyzed, the authors posited that women find their voice as they experience their lives and through their efforts to "put the knower back into the known and claim the power of their own minds and voices" (p. 19).

This work remains important and was helpful as I thought about and designed my study because it identified ways of knowing which previously were not acknowledged by male centric developmental studies. It did this by offering epistemological frameworks as a way to think about identity and identity shifts. The epistemological frameworks helped to shift the identity conversation away from psychological stages of development. It also contributed to understandings of knowledge being constructed within communities in which mothers are knowers. Furthermore, it allowed readers to consider identities as women shifted from silence to voice as they experienced relationships within their communities. In my research, this book has been important because, like Gilligan's work, it contributed to the experiences I was having with multiple explanations of a single event. For example, when I inquired into the experiences Sam

and I had while tutoring, I thought deeply about Sam's wanting to be storied as a reader. I understood his desire to be known as a reader was not one of the boxes on my checklist of skills to remediate. It was not, for example, an issue of wanting phonological awareness or a weakness of short-term memory. Knowing this pushed me to puzzle beyond the checklist in my efforts to deepen understandings of my experiences of tutoring. In so doing, it gave me another lens from which to think about the complexities of a life. Moreover, because some of the research participants in Belenky's study were recruited because they self-identified as wanting information about parenting, I was afforded an opportunity to think about the positioning of the women in my study as they too had self-identified as wanting to improve their literacies. In addition, this work influenced my thinking in that it foregrounded the importance of the relational and it constantly reminded me I was in relation with participants. This was an important reminder for me throughout the tutoring. Finally, this work allowed another opportunity to think about how contexts call forward different ways of knowing and in turn, how future experience is influenced. When I recalled the little girls in my class, I wondered how the classroom had influenced our stories. Prior to the event, I had known myself as teacher, one who comforted children, who saw to their well-being, one who was in control. On this particular day, a day soaked in vivid images and stories out of Montreal, the children had tended to my emotional state. Within the classroom, on the familiar story carpet during opening activities, the physical space remained the same; however, it shifted in that it became a place where I was afforded a safe space to express my vulnerabilities.

Kerby (1991), a psychologist, has also contributed to the research conversation about identities. He believes language is the medium through which we constitute identity. According to Kerby, self-narration is used to understand and interpret the richness of humans. Individuals,

Kerby argued, have a self-identity and are conscious of it. Into this knowing is the temporality of physical bodies and the temporality of past, present, and future experiences. Experience, he argued, involves a continuous process of drawing the significant bits into the whole, while appreciating temporality. He argued that an individual will over time act in characteristic ways. He leaned on the work of Bourdieu (1977) when he referred to this as *habitus*. Bourdieu, drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's (1962) notions of perception, defined *habitus* as a process an individual creates which is a system of lasting and changeable "dispositions." Specifically, he wrote:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (p. 72)

Kerby (1991) borrowed this notion when he described *habitus* as a process of "acts reinforced by reactivation and repetition . . . but also the result of acts and decisions guided and often determined by a constraining social order and environment" (p. 20). This *habitus*, he argued, settles upon the parameters of one's acts, turning history into nature.

Kerby (1991) continued by suggesting one can act beyond habit because of the constitution of self, the being in the world that is afforded by the mental processes of memory, imagination, emotion and language. He suggested humans engage in these processes in efforts to "reconstruct a more or less coherent story of certain past events" (p. 22). An individual

determines her notion of narrative coherence based on her understanding of what it means to compose a life. Memory, he said, affords the continuation of identity because it gives a point of comparison to the past. Identity therefore, according to Kerby, is the identity one is aware of; brought into awareness based on the degree to which one can penetrate her recollections. However, he said, memory is a representation of the past and it must be interpreted. It is then also a creative act because it involves recollections and the creative act of interpreting them.

Kerby's (1991) work was another reminder of the importance of temporality in the stories humans live and tell. This was a particularly poignant reminder as I heard story details shift over time and as I came to appreciate the shifting and dependent reliability of memory. For example, when I listened to digital recordings of Sam's and my tutoring sessions and read daybook entries, I understood stories shifted through time. In part, this reflected shifting understandings of experiences and therefore shifting significance and shaping influence of stories. During the summer when I tutored Sam, I did not think about our shared experiences as efforts to shift the identity stories being told in school about Sam. It was later as a doctoral student, when I inquired into the stories, that I began to understand them through the lens of identity and identity shifts.

MacIntyre (1998), a philosopher, did not consider identity in terms of psychological stages. He argued humans are story-telling beings and therefore humans' sense of self is grounded in the stories humans tell. Stories, he said, give us context and the context is impacted by temporality and culture. Therefore, he argued, personal identity is influenced by one's place in society and by the interconnectedness of events. When individual events are judged as not possessing meaning, they do not fit within the story of a life. For MacIntyre (1984), one's narrative history is embedded in a social context and "the unity of a human life is the unity of a narrative quest" (p. 211).

I returned to MacIntyre's work with some regularity as I struggled to understand some of my own stories. MacIntyre's work was a constant prompt to consider the interconnectedness of stories. Thinking about MacIntyre's work allowed me to wonder about school, familial and societal contexts in which stories were embedded. For example, when I thought about the three girls, I wondered what stories to live (cultural, familial, institutional, and others) they brought to school and how had these stories shaped our experiences? From this wondering, I set a course to better understand educational policies from the time period of the early school stories the participants shared. This was helpful in that it provided another contextual layer of understanding because as I tentatively placed the told stories within institutional, educational and societal plotlines, I was afforded opportunities to wonder and puzzle over the forward and backward influences on the stories the women shared. Finally, this work allowed me to think again about time and how it is not a neutral commodity. When I inquired into the Montreal Massacre story, there were moments when I experienced embodied emotional memories. I was flooded with memory shards, which I experienced in my body. From this, I understood that the morning following the Montreal Massacre was not simply the time stamp of December 7, 1989. More than 20 years later, minutes from that morning were drawn forward in embodied memories which brought me back in time and brought time forward and would continue to influence my future stories.

Bruner (2004) argued "world making is the principal function of the mind" (p. 691) [and] "we seem to have no other way of describing 'lived time' save in the form of a narrative" (p. 692). His second thesis is that there is imitation between life and narrative and the imitation is two-way. Life, he argues, is created by humans using their imagination, such that we construct narratives as both a cognitive and interpretive achievement. As both narrator and protagonist,

one is faced with dilemmas; regardless, one attempts to be mindful of what Bruner refers to as the “criteria of rightness,” while at the same moment acknowledging that the stories one tells are “highly susceptible to cultural, interpersonal, and linguistic influences” (p. 694). These structures, he argues, eventually have the ability to shape lived experience and memory, such that, in the end one becomes the stories one tells of oneself. Bruner wonders “how our way of telling about ourselves changes, and how these accounts come to take control of our ways of life” (p. 695). He believes that the way we conceptualize and tell stories become habitual and, in so doing, they structure experience, influence how we remember and how we imagine our future. If, he says, these habits occur early in a person’s life, they can persist even in the face of contrary evidence, regardless of how harmful they are. Moreover, according to Bruner (1992), a narrative view of identity formation and identity shifts allows one to ask “why one story rather than another. And such questioning may lead to the suspicion that ‘official’ or ‘enforced’ conceptions of self might be used to establish political or hegemonic control by one group over the other” (p. 114).

Bruner’s (2004) voicing of this concern was important because it was part of an ongoing waking up to puzzling over how language is used to construct narrow plotlines of literacy competencies. I had used terms like learning disabled, at risk, and struggling reader with little thought to the potential influences on individual children and their families. I understood Sam’s stories and Bruner’s concerns for “enforced” conceptions as an opportunity to think deeply about how I was influencing the stories others tell of themselves. Moreover, I puzzled over a grand narrative which stories literacies as a vehicle to self improvement. Moreover, I was mindful of Bruner’s ideas in my effort to tell some of the early dysfunction I experienced and as I struggled to hear some of the stories the women told and retold me as they attempted to live out new

stories. I was particularly mindful of mis-educative stories laid early in one's life and the potential for narrative reverberations (Young, 2003), reverberations which maintain the limited plotlines set down throughout the early stories. I wondered what stories were necessary to counter or interrupt mis-educative, early stories to live by. Bruner's work reminded me to attend carefully to language and the specific words which compose a story.

Carr (1986) argued the structure inherent in narrative is how humans experience and act and how they organize through time. Carr wrote, "narrative structure . . . is the organizing principle not only of experience and actions but of the self who experiences and acts" (p. 73). From this argument I understand that humans use narrative (unity, coherence,²⁷ incoherence and structure) as they struggle to construct themselves and in their efforts to connect experiences through time. Each of us is engaged in a struggle to construct narrative unities and therefore coherence; however, we also experience narrative incoherence. Carr argues there are two parts to coherence: the living out of a narrative and the construction of said narrative. Humans, he argues, have a need for things to make sense and therefore, we are constantly engaged in a process where we tell and retell stories of self. Into this process he adds temporality because time is around us and we appreciate the past as part of present and future experiences. Carr wrote the, "past is still viewed in light of its connection to present and future in an ongoing project" (p. 98).

Thinking about Carr's (1986) notion of narrative unities and the morning following the Montreal Massacre, I was struggling for a narrative coherence which did not exist. So while there are narrative unities, on that particular day I was unable to construct one and therefore I was awash in narrative incoherence. And perhaps three little girls also struggled with narrative coherence as they experienced their usually confident, upbeat teacher as deeply sad. I imagine it

²⁷ Carr (1986) described coherence as: "a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense." (p. 97).

was their struggle for coherence that saw them come alongside me, embrace me and lessen my ache and in so doing helped me to shift to Sandra, their teacher, who fit coherently within their stories. Or perhaps, the shared moment afforded the girls a moment to expand their understandings of their teacher in ways which were more coherent, to how they knew and experienced the world. From this, I understand struggle and coherence as nonlinear in that one does not always lead to the other, such that narrative incoherence can be the story. From Sam's story, I understand his effort to be included with the group of children who were storied as readers was, in part, his struggle for narrative unity; he wanted to be known and to know himself as a reader. Carr's work then is critical to how I understand and think about identities and the stories we struggle to tell as we endeavor to shift our identities. I understand this struggle as ongoing, complex and involving oneself, others, the interaction between, the physical places and contexts where we have experiences. Sam was struggling in and out of school with himself, with his teacher, and with me, his tutor, in his efforts to shift an identity story he did not want.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) posited, "humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative . . . is the study of the ways humans experience the world (p. 2). Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work is embedded in their narrative understanding of the world such that they connect experience and narrative constructs of identities and identity shifts. I understand, therefore, that when they conceive of an individual's identity, they think about the "continuity and wholeness of an individual's life experiences" (p. 17). In coining the term *stories to live by* (1999) they "understood how knowledge, context, and identity are linked and can be understood narratively" (p. 4). Moreover, they argued stories to live by are "given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context" (p. 4). Thinking about the children embracing me physically and emotionally as

they came alongside me on that bleak morning, I understand Clandinin and Connelly's (1990) and Carr's (1986) argument that we are living out and telling our stories; we embody the stories we live out and tell. This understanding has been a constant thread through the 4 years of my doctoral studies because it was a gentle reminder that individuals are embodiments of storied potential which exists on storied, temporal landscapes. By this I mean people and their embodied and told stories hold the potential for teaching and learning, for shifting stories if only individuals are wide-awake and attentive. Moreover, their identity work repeatedly drew me back to a consideration of the relational because as stories are told and retold between individuals, future relational stories are possible and affected.

Two other researchers, King (2003) and Greene (1995), influenced my thinking. King reminded me to consider my responsibility to the women and to all people included in the stories I write. King (2003) argued stories shape who we are and how we understand and interact with people. King suggests the stories we tell and how we interpret them, therefore, are critical, because they carry moral and social responsibilities which have the potential to influence how we know and live our lives. Linking this way of knowing with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) foregrounding of the importance of alongside relational stories with participants over time, I was regularly attentive to the magnitude of the study, the women, the relationships and the inherent multifaceted responsibilities. Greene (1995) kept me hopeful as she reminded me over and over again that the living of a life is a process of becoming. This was an invaluable reminder when I concluded that I had come up short as an alongside researcher/tutor and when the participants bumped up against narrow plotlines as they struggled to create future, educative stories.

Another body of work which influences how I understand intersections of literacies, identities and identity shifts is the work done under the name of post-structural theory. Ideas such

as positioning and subjectivity deepened my understanding of how systems (language) form meanings and therefore possibilities for the constituting of identities. These ideas allowed me to wonder about the connections between language and experiences and to wonder about “the ways that language shaped the social, cultural, and institutional narratives and how these narratives, in turn, shaped the individual person” (Clandinin et al. 2006, p. 1). Post-structural theorists posit every experience is mediated by language and said meanings shift depending on context. Davies (1991) commented, “we can only ever speak ourselves or be spoken into existence within the terms of available discourses . . . choices are understood as more akin to ‘forced choices’, since the subject’s positioning within particular discourses makes the ‘chosen’ line of action the only possible action” (pp. 42, 46). When I thought about Sam, I wondered how was the language his teacher, mother and I used positioning him and was said positioning educative? Sam understood he had been positioned as struggling, one needing additional help. He also knew his two best friends were not being tutored throughout the summer vacation. Sam knew himself as something less than his friends. He came to tutoring with a clear expectation of needing to improve.

Post structuralism kept me awake to the importance of language and the influences of discursive practices. Thinking about Sam wanting to be known as a boy who could read and his mother’s worries that if he did not read, he would be labeled with a learning disability, I understand how the stories we tell are built into the word choice labels we use. Sam’s mother believed a learning disabled label would give permission for teachers to know her son as less capable and therefore their expectations for him would shrink back. Such a position did not fit coherently with the stories Sam’s mom wanted for her son. I pull this work forward because it helped me to make sense of positioning and narrowing plotlines; however, I understand post-structuralism as existing on a conceptual borderland with narrative inquiry because it does not

deal directly with lived experiences, therefore it fails to know experiences as a source of knowledge, nor does it know stories as a resource in efforts to ameliorate experience (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007).

Finally, the work of Lindemann Nelson (2000) deepened my understandings of identity shifts. Specifically, her work kept me awake to counterstories which she defined “as a narrative that takes up a shared but oppressive understanding of who someone is, and sets out to shift it” (p. 95). Moreover her work reminded me of the links between identity and agency because she wrote, “how I and others understand who I am profoundly affects the range of options that are open to me” (p. 95). Thinking of Sam’s struggle to shift the story on the school landscape on which he was not a reader allows me to understand how the story was oppressing him and his mother. He needed to be known as a competent reader (a counterstory to the remarks [master narrative²⁸] on his final report card) so this story would be taken up by his teachers and therefore they would contribute to his shifting stories.

Lindemann Nelson’s (2001) argument is that “through their capacity for narrative repair of identities injured by oppression, counterstories can provide a significant form of resistance to the evil of diminished agency” (p. 9). Moreover, she argues counterstories “aim to alter, when necessary, an oppressed person’s perception of herself” (p. 9). I understand Sam’s wanting to be storied as a reader was his efforts to narratively repair his knowing of self and his teachers knowing of him.

²⁸ Lindemann Nelson (2001) wrote, “master narratives are often archetypal, consisting of stock plots and readily recognizable character types, and we use them not only to make sense of experience but also to justify what we do” (p. 8).

My Understanding of Narrative Constructions of Identity

The section above was written in an effort to outline particular terms. Pulling forward strands from the above theorists, I have come to understand narrative constructions of identities and identity shifts. I begin with Dewey's (1938) theory of experience (continuity, interaction and situation) as the foundation from which I understand narrative constructions of identities. Next, I am drawn to the work of MacIntyre (1998) because I also understand humans to be story telling beings in that they tell who they are through story. Clandinin and Connelly (1999, 2000), Lindemann Nelson (2001), and Carr (1986) are critical to my work because they foreground the notion of struggle as one composes a life and they argue narrative coherence is not always the result, regardless of the effort(s). Moreover Carr and Clandinin and Connelly remind me my identities are not only in the stories I tell, they are embodied in my living through time and context and they live in bodies. Relying on the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1999) I understand identity as embodied, fluid, multiple, evolving, shifting and contradictory depending upon context and through time. Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote, "identity is understood as a unique embodiment of his/her stories to live by-stories shaped by the landscapes past and present in which s/he lives and works" (p. 112).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Narrative researchers are concerned with the representation of experience, causality, temporality and the difference between the experience of time and the telling of time, narrative form, integrity of the whole in a research document, the invitational quality of a research text, its authenticity, adequacy and plausibility. Currently in narrative inquiry, it is important for each researcher to set forth the criteria that govern the study and by which it may be judged. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999a, p. 139)

My research puzzle grew out of three main wonders: curiosities about the intersections of literacies and identities, particularly how literacies influence, shape, and re-shape women's identities; questions about how identities were influenced through 6 months of tutoring and research conversations; and wonders about how I, a maker of curriculum, influence the relational space and how the participants shape it. Downey and Clandinin (2010) wrote, "narrative inquiry. . . [is] concerned with how humans connect what they do to what their doing does to them, [and] 'stories both lived and told' as the connector of the person in the world" (p. 385). My "understanding is a deeply narrative one conceptualized within a Deweyan view of experience with temporal dimensions, personal-social dimensions and dimensions of place" (Clandinin et al., 2006 p. 1). It was these wonders, and this narrative understanding of experience which shaped my research puzzle, my study and how I know and reflect upon living.

Within these wonders and within this inquiry, I understand we are part of the parade. We have helped make the world in which we find ourselves. We are not merely objective inquirers, people on the high road, who study a world lesser in quality than our moral temperament would have it, people who study a world we did not

help create. On the contrary, we are complicit in the world we study. Being in this world, we need to remake ourselves as well as offer up research understandings that could lead to a better world. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 61)

I know myself as a participant in the parade, as one who wants to engage in research which contributes to a community, which makes the world better. Moreover, I understand “lived and told stories and talk about stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another’s assistance in building lives and communities” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 35). I also know and understand myself as one who is engaged in the world I study, such that I make the world, and in the relationships I co-compose such that I/we are making the world. These ways of knowing are grounded in my ontological and epistemological assumptions. It is therefore important to articulate my assumptions before I begin to construct a discussion of methodology. Understanding my assumptions was important because in so doing I came to understand that the best way to deepen understandings of the experiences of women with literacies less than they desire, their struggles to shift their identities, and my experiences as tutor/researcher was to inquire into experiences over time. This is the case because, like Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), I understand, “... experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry-narrative or otherwise proceeds” (p. 38). Furthermore, I understand experience “is a changing stream that is characterized by continuous interaction of human thought with our personal, social, and material environment” (Clandinin & Rosiek, p. 39). Moreover, because I assumed there would be future experiences embedded within the study which would influence what we came to understand, the ontological grounding had to account for the temporal unfolding of events and for shifts in identities. In addition, it had to account for the backward and forward influences of experience(s) into the context of a particular moment

because all of the experiences of a life have the potential to shape field texts²⁹ over time. “The consequence of this fluidity for making field texts is that there is a virtually endless list of life experiences that might be and frequently are turned into field texts of value to the inquiry” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p, 115).

In the following chapters, I repeatedly made decisions about the inquiry process. This methodology chapter is purposeful in that it “tells the story of how [my] . . . representation[s] of the world emerged within a stream of experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 40) and, therefore, how I made decisions.

The Study: Conceptual Ground

My ontological assumptions, the ways in which I understand the nature and origins of knowledge, experience and identities are shaped by Dewey’s (1938) work. I know myself to be continuously transacting with various contexts, constantly being influenced such that my knowing(s) and my identities unfold through time. This way of knowing constantly shapes and re-shapes the way I know and experience the world, the way I know myself and others as we transact, and the ways in which I engage in research. In my work, I take this up such that I understand I am constantly composing, recomposing and having my identities (stories to live by) influenced and constituted. Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1999), who grounded their work in Dewey’s theory of experience, argued *stories to live by* are a conceptual framework for narratively understanding the links between what one knows, the various contexts in which one lives, and identities. Stories to live by, Clandinin and Rosiek (2006) argued, “are the form of representation that describes human experience as it unfolds through time” (p. 40). Moreover, I

²⁹ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) use the term field texts to describe data. Some examples of field texts are: stories, autobiographies, journals, field notes, letters, research conversations, interviews, family stories, photographs, memory boxes, artifacts, field texts created by participants, and life experience.

know experiences to be ontologically connected, one to another, such that any particular experience fits within the full range of experiences. In turn, this leads me to understand, “inquiry is an act within a stream of experience that generates new relations that then become part of future experiences” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 41). It is the generation of new relations and possibilities for future stories which allow me to know myself as hopeful. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) wondered, “how will we retell our stories with new insights and how will we relive them with changed practices in our lives” (p. 250). Moreover they noted the “goal is to engage in retellings that lead to different social narratives” (p. 250). These ways of knowing the world and these understandings of experience led me to undertake a narrative inquiry.

My ongoing struggles for narrative coherence were influenced by the curriculum studies and narrative inquiry courses I participated in during the first year of my program³⁰. In these courses, I was instructed to wonder about who I am as a maker of curriculum. I thought about and inquired into my early stories to live by and wondered how they had and were influencing my identities as a maker of curriculum³¹. Over time, and because of the ongoing struggles to know and understand my ontological and epistemological assumptions, I understood that narrative inquiry afforded me opportunities to think deeply about experience and to conceptualize it narratively, with temporal, personal-social and place dimensions (Clandinin et al, 2006). Furthermore, narrative inquiry afforded a three dimensional space from which to inquire into multiple and fluid identities and identity shifts. The three dimensional narrative

³⁰ When describing Dewey’s notion of learning, Downey & Clandinin (2010) wrote, “the inevitable muddiness that comes with muddling along; the turns that shift us from our original course of action, pointing us instead onto unexpected and unmarked routes that we then struggle to learn to navigate. Learning begins only when certainty ends” (p. 385). This was the process I engaged.

³¹ Clandinin & Connelly (1992) wrote, “curriculum might be viewed as an account of teachers’ and students’ lives together in schools and classrooms... It is a view in which teacher is seen as an integral part of the curricular process and in which teacher, learner, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction” (p. 392).

inquiry space allowed me to understand how I could deepen the understandings of women living with literacies less than they desired as they attended through 6 months of tutoring because it provided a structure to think about and reflect upon experience, particularly the experiences of struggling to shift identities. It also gave structure to my wonders about the intersections of identities and literacies. Moreover, I understood that the methodology I selected had to foreground the importance of the relational, because I knew I would ask participants to share their stories. I wanted to ask for and receive stories from a place of respect and caring, Craig and Huber (2007) noted, “relationship is the heart of living alongside in narrative inquiry- indeed, relationships form the nexus of this kind of inquiry space” (p. 249). Having lived through the experiences of coming alongside Jean Clandinin and having shared hard, endured stories, I understood research conversations could be educative (Dewey, 1938) and could be places where one imagined future, educative stories to live by. This was important because as Downey and Clandinin (2010) noted, Dewey considered “growth to be the fundamental overarching goal of any experience, which he understood in terms of the quality and type of experiences” (p. 384). I wanted to transact with participants in ways which were educative. As I wondered, studied, read, and engaged with colleagues within the CRTED, my ontological and epistemological understandings were constantly in the making, becoming. This was because “the focus of a narrative inquiry is not only on individuals’ experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 42).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) wrote the following definition of a narrative inquiry:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People

shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under study. (p. 477)

My understanding of the definition influenced how I framed my research puzzle, as I described in Chapter 1. I was also influenced while I researched and wrote my candidacy paper because I was engaged in a process which Dr. Clandinin repeatedly referred to as “imagining it up” and I understood this to mean imagining up future stories of the study. There were no participants at the time of the candidacy paper writing and examination, nevertheless I had to imagine them and imagine our study. I wondered how my imaginings would influence and shape the tutoring, research conversations and my unwritten dissertation. Moreover, because I understood experiences were ontologically connected, I thought deeply about how my extensive reading and my participation with the CRTED were shaping my identities and therefore the woman I would be as a tutor/researcher.

Once over the candidacy hurdle, I turned my attention to the completion of an ethics application. This proved to be an interesting process, for it required attention to minute details and it took two unsuccessful attempts before I realized this. Today as I think about the unsuccessful submissions, I do not believe I linked the details of the online forms to the specifics of my study. Once I did this, once I was able to “imagine up” myself and

participants, I understood the need for specific details. I had to draw the online forms closer, in a more meaningful way. I had to shift my understanding beyond conceiving of them as a task to be accomplished. I had to imagine myself as the one who would guarantee confidentiality.

Finding Participants

Having cleared ethics, I turned my attention to locating women who would participate in the study. This proved to be difficult; I began to worry the study would not get off the ground.³² I found myself trying to imagine specific women. I would get on a bus or be in a public place and look around and try to spot a woman who might agree to participate. I was sometimes frustrated because I value the tutoring work I do; I know it as educative on many levels for both me and students. As I waited for³³ research participants, I reviewed the criteria for their selection. It included the following:

1. attended school where English was the primary language of instruction;
2. self-identified as having literacies less than desired;
3. were willing to participate in 6 months of thrice weekly tutoring sessions;
4. were willing to meet for regular research conversations; and
5. were willing to take digital photographs.

The rationale for the five criteria was as follows. First, I was interested in the experiences of women for whom English was the primary language of instruction throughout their schooling. I understood subsequent language acquisition would add a layer of complexity to an already complex study and I wanted to avoid this. There was no requirement that participants be mono-

³² This will be described in greater detail in Edith's narrative account, Chapter 4.

³³ Selection of prepositions was discussed; specifically we wondered if we wait on participants or wait for them. In the end, I selected for because in the process of becoming within a narrative inquiry, one is afforded time to wonder where word choice leads the reader, and which understandings they draw forward. Within this context, do we wait on a participant, which implies service to, or do we wait for a participant which implies waiting on an individual?

lingual or Canadian born, but rather that the language of instruction at school was English. Moreover, because the methodology is narrative inquiry, it involves an alongside, over time relationship. I did not want relationships to be influenced or limited by my inability to speak the first language of participant(s) or by their English abilities. Moreover, because the participants and I met monthly for research conversations, I did not want these conversations to be influenced by subsequent language barriers. Finally, because the narrative accounts are negotiated, I did not want the participants' ability to understand English to influence the negotiation.

As I waited for participants to appear,³⁴ I experienced tension because I am uncomfortable at the start of any relationship. My research poster circulated on electronic mailing lists for approximately a month and I worried. Although four women responded, none had attended schools where English was the primary language of instruction. As days turned to weeks and the tension intensified, I began to search out other possible ways to recruit participants and I wondered if I had made an error in the design of my study. Perhaps I ought to have situated my study within an existing adult literacy program. I went back and listened to the recorded conversations³⁵ with my supervisor, Dr. Clandinin, with whom I had met weekly. During our discussions regarding the design of my study, we spoke about the possibility of embedding my research within an existing adult literacy centre. I was reluctant because I did not want to be influenced by curriculum-as-planned (Aoki, 1993), as delivered by a particular adult literacy centre. Rather, I wanted my study to focus “upon the lives of the teacher and (women) and how their presence is understood by the teacher as ‘identity as effect’ ” (Aoki, 1993, p. 260).

³⁴ Appear is a peculiar word for it implies many things. According to Merriam Webster Online, it can mean: to be or come in sight; to show up, to come formally before an authoritative body, to have an outward aspect, to become evident or manifest, to come into public and to come into existence.

³⁵ Beginning in my second year of my doctoral studies, I met once a week, Tuesday morning at 9:00 am with my supervisor, Dr. D. J. Clandinin. In this document I have referred to my supervisor as Jean and occasionally as Dr. Clandinin.

I contacted local adult literacy programs. I chatted with executive directors, program leaders and intake workers. I sent information packets and continued to wait and wonder. One day, I received a phone call from an intake worker at one of the adult literacy agencies. She wanted to talk about the study. I began by answering her questions as rapidly as I could. When she told me she would speak with her executive director and get back to me, I was deflated. I had hoped she was calling to suggest potential participants. Hanging up the phone, I wondered if I had spoken too quickly, if my answers had been too forceful or if I had talked too much. The tension continued. When she called the next day with the name of a woman whom she believed would be a perfect match for my study, I experienced relief and happiness. When I asked why she believed this particular woman was a perfect match, she said, “Edith³⁶ is hard-working, dedicated, intelligent, and she wants very much to improve her literacy skills. She will come, she will be on time, and she will do whatever homework jobs you give her” (personal communication, October 2009). This is how the intake worker constructed and positioned Edith. I was eager to meet her and I was full of curiosity. A day later she called again, with the name of a second woman, Bella³⁷ who was also interested in participating. She also asked whether she could pass information about the study along to a colleague working at a different adult literacy centre; I agreed. Approximately a month later, I received a phone call from a woman at another adult literacy centre. A colleague of the woman from the initial center, she was calling to introduce me to a third participant, Grace. She described a young woman with three school-aged children who was eager to participate. I agreed and a meeting time and place were arranged³⁸.

³⁶ Edith is pseudonym used to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

³⁷ Bella is a pseudonym used to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

³⁸ Grace began missing tutoring sessions in the first week of her involvement with the study. Each time she would leave a message and I would call her. In the third week she stopped returning my calls and she stopped coming to tutoring. Grace left the study.

Coming Alongside

In my ongoing effort to come alongside the women relationally, my expanding capacity to pay attention when hard to tell stories were shared was influenced by my ontological and epistemological understandings. When I sat across the table as a participant shared a hard story, I clung to Dewey's (1938) theories of experience, particularly his notion of continuity. Understanding that I was being shaped by the experience both in the moment and in future stories allowed me to appreciate that while the story belonged to the participant, my stories to live by were being shaped and re-shaped in the relational space of listening and telling. This understanding afforded me opportunities to be mindful of the relational space between us and to be thoughtful in my response, often sidestepping reaction. Moreover, this knowing supported my efforts to foreground curiosity and avoid judgement. This was important as my relationships with participants developed both in the tutoring sessions and during our monthly research conversations.

As I came alongside the participants, and before beginning the study as I attempted to imagine what alongside would look like, I thought deeply about Dewey (1938), who argued "we live in a world . . . of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities" (p. 40). Within this way of knowing, I thought about the experiences participants had with literacies and wondered how they would influence our relationship. This way of knowing the world got me to wondering if I was capable of staying the course of an alongside relationship. I drew on the example I was living alongside Dr. Clandinin in our weekly meetings. In these meetings, I regularly experienced an invitation to come alongside, to be mindful of the relationship, to wonder about who I was in the space, and

who I might be. I occasionally wished for a less gifted guide because then the task might have seemed less daunting.

When I tutored, I drew forward the ontological understanding that each of us is in the making. Greene (1996) said, “I am who I am not yet.” This allowed me to think deeply about the lessons I planned, the questions I asked, the amount of encouragement I offered, and my willingness to stay the relational course when I came into moments of tension with participants. Dewey (1938) stated, “every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while this modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences” (p. 35). Understanding this shaped every encounter I had with participants and made me wonder deeply about how the participants and I were drawing forward knowing from previous experiences, and how that knowing was shaping the spaces between. With this way of knowing, I was no longer able to assess skills, decide on required remediation and then plan lessons without foregrounding the relational. I could never be sure what knowing would be drawn forward. In response, I learned to adjust, to listen and hear, to be flexible, to slow down, to ask and to attend to what was said and not said. And in response to these changes, the lessons changed and learning changed and we changed and I suspect will continue to change.

Finally, my ontological and epistemological understandings shaped how I interpreted and analyzed field texts³⁹ and the research texts⁴⁰ I wrote because I fundamentally shifted how I understood the research and writing processes. My processes became less linear. Initially this

³⁹ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described field texts as data sources that are created by researchers and participants in order “to represent aspects of field experience” (p. 92). It is from these field texts, “a diverse collection of storied field texts” (p. 139) that research texts are created. It is from the research texts that researchers “ask questions of meaning and social significance (p. 130).

⁴⁰ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described research texts as those texts which result when the inquirer, utilizing the three dimensional narrative inquiry space “composes a text that at once looks backward and forward, looks inward and outward, and situates the experiences within the place” (p. 140).

was completely frustrating. There were moments when I ached to be told what to do and how to do it and if the work I had done was right or wrong. Slowly and over time I realized Jean was not simply talking about coming alongside, about waking up to other ways of knowing and about creating spaces where students knew their ways of knowing were valued; she was living it and she was inviting me to do likewise. I clung to Greene's (1996) idea that I was in the making because I was overwhelmed by the enormity of what it would mean to my stories to live by if I shifted my identities, such that I knew myself as one capable of coming alongside, one capable of being awake to other ways of knowing and one capable of invitational, thoughtful response. This understanding and knowing myself in the making regularly shaped and re-shaped every aspect of this work.

Beginning the Study

Ethics

I engaged in relationships with women as a narrative inquirer. I worked to come alongside the women such that trusting relationships developed. Noddings (1984) wrote about an ethic of care and this is what I worked at. I was guided by a desire to be respectful, trustworthy, open, and patient. Furthermore, I constantly reminded myself of the multiplicity of my role as researcher and researcher/tutor. Neither of these roles required me to be judgmental of the participants or of their stories to live by. I worked attentively and actively to avoid judgement. At all moments, I worked hard to keep the women foremost in my mind. When thinking about, writing about, and discussing my work, I am respectful of the women, the stories they shared, and their vulnerability. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) argued that a deep ethic of care, one beyond that detailed in ethics forms, must be present throughout and this is what I strived for.

They also wrote about the ongoing negotiation of shared narratives between researcher and participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). In 2000, they wrote the following which served as an ongoing reminder of my need and desire to remain awake to ethical concerns:

Ethical matters need to be narrated over the entire narrative inquiry process. They are not dealt with once and for all, as might seem to happen, when ethical review forms are filled out and university approval is sought for our inquiries. Ethical matters shift and change as we move through inquiry. They are never far from the heart of our inquiries no matter where we are in the inquiry process. (Clandinin & Connelly p. 170)

In addition, I completed the mandatory ethics review process which is part of the requirements at the University of Alberta. Approval from the ethics board was first given in November of 2009 and it was renewed in 2010. Throughout the study I adhered to the ethical guidelines as set out in the ethical guidelines at the University of Alberta I was also cognizant of my ongoing ethical, relational responsibilities to myself, Edith and Bella. Part of this responsibility was drawn to my attention by Dr. Vera Caine, a member of my supervisory committee. She made me aware that the possibility existed for the women to share stories which would require an expertise beyond my ability to listen respectfully and compassionately. When Dr. Caine drew this to my attention, I heard what she said, however, at the time I did not think it forward. Thinking about this today, I understand my unwillingness / inability to include myself as one who might potentially require counselling throughout the study as an example of what Frye (1983) referred to as arrogant self perception. Respectful of the suggestion, I linked up with an existing social service agency. I made the agency aware of my study and alerted them to the

possibility that the women might require their services. Dr. Caine's⁴¹ advice proved to be invaluable.

Initially I met with each woman three times to discuss the study; answer questions; share the informed consent forms (see appendix); informally determine reading, comprehension, and writing levels; and begin the process of telling early stories to live by of home, school, and family. During the first meeting I shared tea with each participant as we spoke in my office. I met with the women individually. At this meeting, I asked the women to sign letters agreeing to their willingness to participate. I informed them of the details of the study and invited them to ask questions. I told them they were free to withdraw at any moment and confidentiality was promised; pseudonyms were used. Moreover, I explained to them any information which impeded confidentiality would not be used. During the second meeting we informally determined reading, comprehension, and writing levels. During the third meeting, the women told stories of their early experiences of home, school, and family.

After our three individual meetings, we began the tutoring and Edith and Bella met for the first time. As the relationships developed, I asked the women if they would share artifacts during our monthly research conversation and they agreed. We first met in early November 2009, and by the middle of the month we were tutoring. Initially I planned that the tutoring sessions would happen three times per week for 60 minutes. After the second week of tutoring, Edith commented she felt we were just getting into the work and the hour was up. She wondered if we could extend the tutoring for 90 minutes and so we did. Our last tutoring day was May 24, 2010. We met for tutoring 59 times over the 6 months. I also met once a month individually with

⁴¹ It is interesting to note that as I prepared for the study it did not occur to me that I might require and or benefit from the services of a counsellor. This is precisely what happened because as I experienced the hard stories told to me by Bella and Edith, I needed help to learn to listen to them without taking them on. This will be discussed further in my narrative account.

the women for an ongoing research conversation in my office in an effort to be attentive to shifts in identities.

Our tutoring sessions occurred three times per week, Monday, Tuesday and Thursday mornings. We met in a small classroom on the second floor of the Faculty of Education. Having completed the initial informal assessment of the women's skills I wrote lesson plans. We began each class in a similar fashion, I asked the women if they had any questions or if they wanted to comment on anything. We then moved to a review of the previous day's work, including vocabulary words and an opportunity to drill an ever increasing pile of grapheme flashcards⁴². We then worked on spelling, sentence and paragraph writing. The final thirty minutes of class was spent reading aloud from a novel and discussing what was read. The order of the instructional elements shifted depending on the ongoing direction offered by the women, however, for the most part, each session contained the elements as noted.

Once a month I invited each of the women to a research conversation in my office in the Faculty of Education. These conversations were opened ended. I usually had a few questions; however, the conversations were not structured. We discussed the tutoring, the women shared stories from their lives and often they offered suggestions of things they would like to learn and occasionally they used the conversations to invite to me to events.

Field Texts

Living alongside the women as they told stories of who they were, are, and are becoming as they engaged in literacy tutoring, we composed a range of field texts in efforts to deepen understandings of the complexities of their stories to live by. Acknowledging Dewey's (1938) concern for the temporal, social, and relational nature of experience, we composed field texts

⁴² A grapheme is a unit of written language. It is the written representation of a phoneme.

before, during, and after the tutoring. Moreover, I was cognizant of a concern raised by Clandinin and Connelly (1994) that field texts ought to be “created by participants and researchers to represent aspects of field experience” (p. 419). Each field text therefore is in some way attentive to one or more of the commonplaces⁴³, attentive to the “multidimensional, ever changing life space” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 481) of each of the locations where the study occurred or where the study led, and was always attentive to the relationships between researcher and participants.

The field texts consisted of digital recordings and transcripts of all research conversations, digital recordings of all tutoring sessions, field notes, artifacts, digital photographs taken by one woman, journals, lesson plans, letters I wrote to the women, and digital recordings of my weekly supervisory meetings. The selection of these field texts was purposeful in my desire to be attentive to what Connelly and Clandinin (2000) referred to as alongside. In this they were referring to “what narrative inquirers do when they are in for the long haul and when they are working toward intimacy of relationship” (p. 78). Moreover, I was attentive to who I was as both researcher and tutor. In particular, I worked at remaining wide awake (Greene, 1995) to tensions which arose during the tutoring. Bateson (2001) described the “wisdom that is born of the overlapping of lives, the resonances between stories” (p. 242). In being awake to this potential of overlapping lives, I was attentive to how the women’s participation in the tutorials resonated and or came into tension with my stories to live by. Moreover the field texts were purposeful in that they are “...close to experience, tend to be descriptive, and are shaped around particular events” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 132).

⁴³ Clandinin and Connelly wrote narrative inquiry is “collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction with milieus” (p. 20). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the commonplaces as “personal and social (interaction); past, present, and future (continuity); combined with the notion of place (situation)” (p. 50).

Through my readings, I began to wonder what counts as a field text. I read Bach's work (2007) and knew I would ask the women to take photographs which represent to them what it means to live a life with literacies less than one desires. This was the case because "my knowing of what it means to learn, to construct knowledge, is that the visual is important" (Bach, 2007, p. 281). I asked Edith to take pictures to show me what it means to her to be a woman living in a western Canadian, city with literacies less than she desired. I did this because I understood the photographs and the stories Edith shared of them would be sites of inquiry, such that we would "make meaning of experience both visually and narratively" (Bach, p. 281). Furthermore I understood "as photographs and stories were shared, resonance across stories become apparent" (Bach, 2007, p. 282).

I gave Edith the camera in April of 2010. I asked her to take pictures of persons, places or things which represent her struggles with literacies and or her efforts to improve them. She took the camera and off she went. During our next research conversation, she brought the camera back and I downloaded the images onto my hard drive. First, we looked at the pictures in silence. I wanted to interact with the images in silence. I deleted any that were blurry because I am visually impaired and blurry images give me a headache. The second time through, without any direction from me, Edith began telling stories of why she had taken each picture, what it meant to her and how it represented her experiences as a woman living with literacies less than she desired. I recorded our conversation and I made notes as she spoke. Sometimes I ask her to say more. This response proved interesting because on a number of occasions, Edith said, "Sandra, you remember that story I told you about ----? Well this picture is like that story, but it shows it" (research conversation, May, 2010). Later when we were in the midst of composing her narrative account, she came to my office and we went through the pictures once again. I asked

her to select photographs which best told these stories. She selected pictures and then I asked her again to share stories of the pictures, which she did. I was struck by the stories because when she showed a picture and shared a story it “added layers of meaning to stories” (Bach, 2007, p. 283). When Edith pointed to things in the picture, and then added words, I both saw the picture differently and understood the story differently. As she spoke I “moved backward and forward with words and images” (Bach, 2007, p.283) while thinking through the three dimensional narrative inquiry space and the feelings and emotions I was experiencing. Through this process of reading, listening and looking I was also thinking deeply about Clandinin and Connelly’s (1999) notion of stories to live by and how knowledge and context shape the stories we live, tell and retell. I understood the pictures and the stories Edith told were sites of inquiry, however, I also wondered how I represent the pictures and stories as research text. I included the photographs therefore because I understand they make the text “glow with life” (Ely, 2007, p. 569) and because I understood they included affordances for deepening understandings of what it means to live a life with literacies of less than one desires. They also afforded opportunities for stories which helped me to wake-up and remain awake to the ways Edith experienced the world. This was helpful, particularly as I was in the process of shifting my personal practical knowledge (Clandinin, 1986) and how I knew and named myself as teacher. Bella did not take photographs; she expressed no interest in doing so.

Field Text to Research Texts

I read Ely’s (2007) chapter about representation of research text and my wonders were many. I began to think about the many ways to represent research texts and the subsequent multiple meanings a reader might construe. Ely wrote “the clear objective is to present and sustain the view that, no matter how excellent the gathering of information, in the final instance

people must want to read what we wrote” (p. 569). Moreover, she commented “toward that aim, our reports must glow with life” and “narrative researchers are obliged to present the stories of those people in ways that cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared” (p. 569). Mostly though Ely’s work reminded me “we cannot say that narrative reflects “the” reality. We can say that with the help of the reader, narrative creates a version of reality” (P. 571). This reminder fit with my ontological understanding of Rosenblatt’s (2005) transactional theory of reading which purports a view that focuses on the reader’s relationship with text. Rosenblatt (1938) wrote:

The special meaning, and more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition. These and many other elements in a never-to-be-duplicated combination determine his response to the peculiar contribution of the text. (pp. 30-31)

For each woman and for me, I/we composed a narrative account. I included a narrative account for myself because deepening understandings of how I influenced the relational space and how my identities shifted was part of the wonders from which I shaped my research puzzle. The analysis and interpretation was done, slowly and thoughtfully over time. Through time and by “repeatedly asking questions concerning meaning and significance” I looked for “the patterns, narrative threads, tensions either within or across an individual’s experience and in social setting” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 132). Composing the accounts, we drew on the field texts (as noted above) while thinking through the three dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described the inquiry process as

follows: “to experience an experience—that is, to do research into an experience—is to experience it simultaneously in these four ways (backwards, forwards, inward, outward) and to ask questions pointing each way” (p. 50). Moreover, they wrote, “what makes a narrative inquiry is the simultaneous exploration” (p. 479). With this understanding in mind I proceeded.

I began by organizing and gathering field texts. I did this by labelling and then sorting them into one of three groups: Edith, Bella and mine. I made two copies of the transcripts from research conversations and put one copy in my pile and the other in either Bella or Edith’s. I made ongoing field notes of the tutoring sessions and these went into my pile. The pictures Edith took were on my hard drive; I printed off thumbnails and added them to Edith’s pile. I had copies of all of Edith’s journal entries and my responses; these were added to the appropriate pile. The few journal entries Bella wrote were put with her things. Any artifacts the women brought in were put in the appropriate pile. Once all field texts were in the correct pile I continued the inquiry process.

I read everything and made jot notes in the margins. I listened again to each research conversation and made jot notes in the margins of the transcripts. Sometimes I put my headset on and listened to Edith or Bella read as I read through the field texts and looked at the photographs. I liked hearing their voices; it brought them close. I highlighted text which I experienced as significant in my efforts to know narrative threads. I did these things because I understood, that what “shapes field texts into research texts is created by the writers’ experience as they read” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000 p. 133). I was looking and listening for narrative threads in my efforts to deepen understandings of each of our stories to live by. I also listened for moments of tension when Edith and Bella’s stories to live by bumped up against my own in the tutoring sessions, research conversations and in their struggles to shift their identities. I laid the stories

“alongside one another in different ways” (p. 133) and I lay them alongside and read them “in the context of other research and theoretical works” (p. 133). There were moments when I was sure I had “deepened understandings” and then the fluidity and multiplicity of identities would intervene leaving me reforming what I thought I knew. In these moments I understood, “narrative inquiry carries more of a sense of continual reformulation of an inquiry than it does a sense of problem, definition and solution” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 124). While this was sometimes frustrating, it was also an affordance because it allowed me to think again about the intersections of identities and identity shifts and literacies.

I began by drafting interim narrative accounts for Edith, Bella and me. During this writing I was attentive to tensions, the bumping up of our ‘stories to live by’. I shared these interim texts with Jean and she responded in ways which called me to think about assumptions, consider other ways of knowing and to wonder which stories we were telling, retelling and reliving in our struggles to shift identities. I shared these texts with Bella and Edith and we negotiated the accounts. This proved to be a powerful experience because the women responded in ways which thickened the texts, deepening understandings of their experiences such that many footnotes were added as a result.

When the women and I were satisfied with the narrative accounts of each of us, I began to look across the accounts. I understood that, in part, the research text would include stories told before beginning our study, during and after. With Jean’s guidance I began to think about laying these before, during and after stories alongside one another and alongside my own. I was wondering about the stories we told of ourselves before beginning, the stories we told in the midst and the stories we told once the study was completed. This was the case because this study included an intervention of 6 months of tutoring. I also looked for moments where our stories

bumped up and tension resulted because I understood tension as a place of inquiry, a place where it was possible to deepen understandings and this is what this study set out to do.

During the writing, I was ever mindful of my ethical understandings of what it means to be a narrative inquirer and what it means to engage in a narrative inquiry. With these considerations in mind, I consistently foregrounded respect for the women and their stories, which they told, retold, and relived with me alongside. I met with the women through the writing and made changes when the woman felt the writing was not representative of their experiences. I also asked each woman to select a pseudonym to keep her identity confidential. As I wrote the narrative accounts, I also met weekly with my writing group and they graciously responded to my work. Their responses were most helpful in that they provided fresh eyes and supportive commentary.

I do not mean to suggest I progressed in a linear fashion; this was not the case. Each week I brought my pages⁴⁴ to my weekly meeting with Jean. These pages became what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to as interim texts. They were “part and parcel of the ongoing research defined by the inquiry” (p. 133). Looking back over my ten months of writing I am of the mind, I often wrote interim texts when I was in the midst of a story or in the midst of waking up to other ways of knowing. For example, when I laid Edith and Bella’s stories of struggling to know themselves as readers alongside my context free story of Sandra, the reader, I was afforded opportunities to inquire into my early landscapes such that I shifted how I named, knew and appreciated the complex, literacy rich environment my parents created for their children as part of their efforts to know and name their children as readers. Inquiring into these

⁴⁴ Pages to Jean on Tuesday is something each of her students is familiar with because there is a clear expectation that progress is being made and in part that progress is represented by pages written. And yet there are days when one has no pages to produce. On those days one is thankful for the gentleness of the guide.

stories and writing about them was hard work. The interim text I wrote of these experiences was in the midst of this hard work. At the time there was little of me left to analyze and interpret. This came later when I was able to step back from the hard work of telling and inquiring into early landscapes. The research text in chapter 7 is the result of moving from interim research texts to final research text.

When I wrote chapter seven I focussed my thinking on narrative threads because these were the points of importance that emerged through the narrative accounts. In particular four threads emerged:

1. the importance of resonances across stories, specifically what becomes apparent when we do this;
2. the intersections of knowledge and context in our efforts to shift our stories to live by;
3. the importance of inquiring into our early pre-reflective landscapes;
4. and the importance of place and place recognition in our efforts to retell and relive our stories to live by.

As I wrote chapter 7, I wove the above threads with the literature. This was important because the literature supported my thinking. This work rests on the shoulders of Dewey (1938) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000). This is the case because their work grounded my thinking ontologically and epistemologically and it created a solid scaffolding from which my thinking threaded outward to include the work of other researchers as I struggled to construct and contribute to a conversation about what it means to live with literacies less than one desires and what it means to shift literacy identities. The research then provided lenses from which to inquire

into stories. At other times and with other literature my thinking was led along other paths as I considered how other researchers' work shaped and re-shaped my understandings.

The Ongoing Process of Composing Research Texts

I continued to meet socially with Edith and Bella and we continued to share stories. I found this very helpful because it was a constant, up close reminder of two women about whom I was writing. In Chapters Four, Five and Six I share the three negotiated narrative accounts.

Chapter Four: A Phone Call Which Led to Meeting Edith

Edith's Narrative of Experience

This narrative account begins with the stories Edith told about her early home and school experiences. These stories enabled me to begin to understand the early identity shaping influences of home and school as they intersected with Edith's ongoing struggles to know herself as literate. It then moves to stories from six months of tutoring and two years of research conversations. Through this time we were engaged in an ongoing negotiation of our experiences. Clandinin and Connelly (1988) referred to this as the "negotiation of two peoples' narrative unities" (p. 281). When writing Edith's account I did two things. First, I wrote about Edith's stories as she shared them with me. Next, I wrote about our co-composed experiences. As I wrote, I was mindful of the relational nature of a narrative inquiry methodology such that I was respectful of Edith's stories and of our stories. I understood we were co-constructing our stories. Moreover, I negotiated this narrative account with Edith and made changes, additions and deletions until she knew the account as representative of her told stories and of our co-composed stories. This account then is purposeful because it is a record of the time we spent together and the experiences we co-composed. It is also purposeful because it was from this co-constructed account I later wrote about what I came to understand about Edith as she composed her life with literacies less than she desired and as she struggled to shift her identities. Finally, the reader will note Edith's narrative account is significantly longer than Bella's. This was the case because Edith was active and I was responsive to her efforts to develop our relationship outside of the research settings (tutoring classroom and my office).

After receiving a phone call from an intake worker at an adult literacy centre, I called Edith, a woman the worker believed was a good match for the study. A brief conversation led to

Edith and I making arrangements to meet the following week. Because she was coming to the university on the light rapid transit (LRT), I had to venture into the underground station and locate the meeting place, which Edith had described to me over the phone. I am not native to the city in which I am pursuing my PhD so I experience constant, underlying frustration with my inability to get where I want, when I want (I do not have a car). The LRT station closest to my home and where I was to meet Edith is underground. On the few occasions I used this stop, I experienced claustrophobia as I descended underground; I was not eager to re-enter the station. Nevertheless, I told Edith I would be wearing a red hat and she indicated she would have a cane. She sounded sure and confident in her knowledge of the underground and the LRT system.

When the day arrived, I was leaking.⁴⁵ I went over early to ensure my timely arrival. I remembered the intake worker mentioning that Edith was punctual. I appreciate this habit and wanted to be respectful of it. Moreover, I was not sure if there was a place where Edith could sit if she arrived before me. Edith had said she would have a cane and I did not want her to be waiting for me. I spotted her first, sitting on a bench, cane resting beside her (I was relieved), and reading a book, *Trapped in the Ice* (Walters, 1997). I approached, introduced myself, and then led us out of the station and towards the cafeteria where I planned to offer her something to drink as we discussed the study. We sat down and I went to get drinks. When I returned, Edith asked whether there was another place we could go and chat because she was experiencing difficulty with the noise levels. I too was uncomfortable with the cascading hum of the lunchtime crowd. I asked if she would agree to go upstairs to my office and she willingly did.

In my office we settled ourselves and began sharing stories while I explained the study and presented the paperwork, including the ethics forms. Edith asked if she could take the

⁴⁵ Over the years, I have used this metaphor to describe myself when I am feeling a wide range of powerful emotions simultaneously. On the day I met Edith, I was nervous, anxious, curious and hopeful; I was leaking.

paperwork with her as she had a meeting with her weekly literacy tutor and she wanted to go over it with her. I agreed.

As I write, I am cognizant of a disquiet I am experiencing for if Reddy (1993) suggests words are containers of meaning, then each word I choose will influence what is understood from this chapter and how future chapters are read and understood. Woolf (1929) wrote, “at second sight the words seemed not so simple” (p. 7). Connelly and Clandinin (2006) remind me, “readers often make judgements on participants’ lives and on the researcher-participant relationship as expressed in the text” (p. 483). Therefore I have focused on how I came to meet Edith, how she introduced herself to me and what I experienced in the space we created between us, the space where our relationship tentatively began⁴⁶.

Informal Determination of: Reading, Writing, Spelling and Comprehension Levels

Two days later we met again. Edith found her way to my office in a timely fashion. She noted she’d had a chance to go over the forms with her tutor from the adult literacy centre. She asked a question about confidentiality and then signed. Our next step was to determine her reading level. Using graded passages, I determined her independent reading level was approximately early fifth grade. When I read to her, she was able to answer comprehension questions and engage in conversation related to tenth grade passages. Beyond this, she experienced difficulties with vocabulary, such that her comprehension was negatively impacted, therefore we discontinued the reading. When I asked her to write her hopes for the study in paragraph form, she wrote:

⁴⁶ As we negotiated this text during a research conversation (June 20, 2011) Edith spoke about our first few meetings. She remembered our early meetings as stressful because she did not know what to expect. She recalled she did not want to disappoint me; however she was unsure of what I expected of her. She remembers the stress began to lessen when she understood I was not judging her. She also spoke of how surprised she was to be invited to the University. She never imagined someone at the University would be interested in her life.

I hope to butter myself.

I hope to help my daughter and students.

I like to help Sandra in her studies.

I like to be butter in very day live. (Personal communication, November 2009)

Through this period I was teaching on the go and Edith was learning and retaining information. Later the same day, as I listened to the digital recording of her reading, it seemed she was regularly using two decoding strategies. First, she relied on context clues and her background knowledge in an effort to make sense of what she read. And second, her guesses were always accurate contextually and to the onset phoneme(s). When she was unable to read a word, she took a prolonged look at it and then guessed or said she did not know. When reading, Edith did the following:

1. She self-corrected to make meaning.
2. She stopped when meaning was not being made and did not continue until she understood. This was most often accomplished through self-correction, and occasionally she asked for help with a word.
3. She inserted and deleted words, frequently adding in sounds, um and ah.
4. She had difficulty with some functor words; she had achieved automaticity with others.
5. When Edith came upon the name of a person or place, she noted it was a name and asked for help.
6. She experienced difficulties with polysyllabic words.
7. When reading the early grade passages, which presented few challenges, Edith's reading was choppy and words were called out as single entities. She did not read quickly,

accurately, or with expression. She did not read with prosody. Her reading did not sound smooth and often the pauses were not related to the punctuation.⁴⁷

8. Edith was able to make use of the syllabication instruction I provided on the go. She noted she had never been instructed in the six types of syllables or how to use this knowledge when faced with a polysyllabic word.

Throughout the session, we chatted, laughed, took breaks, and continued. I assumed the familiar position (Davies & Harre, 1990) of tutor and knower. I experienced Edith as highly focussed and intent on whatever task was put before her. She worked rigorously; she did not appear to tire. She assumed the position of student and performed it well. When I listened to the sections where I was teaching about syllabication, I heard Edith asking questions and later attempting to use the syllabication strategies. When we finished, we got out our agendas and set up three future meetings. At these meetings, I invited Edith to share stories of learning to read and stories of school and family. She asked if she could bring her binder of certificates and I welcomed her to do so. I asked if she had any questions; she did not. We said goodbye and off she went. The following week we met in my office on three occasions. During this time, Edith shared early stories of school and family, including her binder of certificates. From this binder I learned Edith had been involved with adult literacy centers for approximately 15 years. During that time, she was regularly recognized for her contribution to the center, her hard work, and her willingness to help others. We began tutoring the following week. Our tutoring sessions were

⁴⁷ Each time I listened to the recording of Edith's reading assessment, I was mindful of goals I have for students who experience reading difficulties; I want them to improve their speed (rate) of reading, word accuracy, and comprehension. I also thought about the tests we give students which determine fluency, in part by measuring the length of time a student requires to read a passage. Edith read slowly with stops and starts and insertions and deletions, nevertheless it did not negatively influence her comprehension. This made me wonder about the goal of improving fluency and it called into question assessments, which become part of diagnostic labels that we use with students. I knew that if I had used standardized reading tests, Edith's reading levels would have been significantly lower. I also knew she was consistently making meaning, which is ultimately what educators want students to do.

held at the university. Once a month, in my office, Edith came and spoke to me in a one-on-one research conversation.

Edith Begins to Tell Stories

Having completed the initial, informal data collection with respect to Edith's reading, writing, spelling and comprehension literacies, I invited her to share stories of learning to read, school and home, and any other stories she cared to share. We met three times before tutoring began and Edith told me stories from her childhood. Through the rest of the year and on into the next, we met regularly to continue our research conversations. From the told stories and the stories we were co-composing while tutoring, I came to know Edith as a woman with complex, fluid, and multiple identities (Clandinin et al., 2006). From her early stories of home and family, I know Edith as an adult child of alcoholic parents, who endured familial dysfunction, and who, at the age of 7 with her older sister, was removed from her home and sent to live with her maternal grandparents. From her school stories, I know Edith as a child who endured a steady diet of exclusion, taunts, and teaching pedagogies at a time when ridicule was tolerated and when differentiated instruction to meet the needs of a student with a learning disability was unheard of. From her stories of work, I know her as an industrious employee who, because of her limited literacies, was restricted to manual labour. Nevertheless, she was appreciated for consistently doing exceptional work. Having met her daughter and listened to stories of their life together, I know Edith as a deeply loving and committed mother. From the stories she has shared of her involvement with adult literacy centres and from experiences I had as a guest at functions, I know Edith as a capable, willing, hardworking, and a deeply appreciated tutor and volunteer. In coming alongside Edith over the past 2 years, I have come to know her in our shared stories as a

willing teacher, hard worker, sometimes as a frustrated wife and mother, and as a woman struggling with chronic illness.

Early Stories of Family and School

Edith was born in small-town Ontario in 1961, one of six children. She has an older brother, an older sister, a twin brother and two younger brothers. For the first 7 years of her life, she endured the familial dysfunction commonly associated with alcoholic parents. As previously mentioned, at the age of 7, Edith and her older sister were removed from the home and sent to live with her maternal grandparents. Her parents separated. Her older brother had difficulties and was sent to a residential home for troubled youth as was her twin brother. Edith has no memories of her parents being involved with school.

Mom didn't care if we went to school or not and they never made us do homework. We didn't have many friends coming over to the house because we were like outcasts; we were the shunned. Other parents would not allow their children to come over to our house. I remember sleeping at one friend's house and I think that happened once I moved in with my grandparents. It was degrading because the other students had parents who cared and ours didn't. I was teased because of my parents. Sometimes we went to school in unwashed, dirty clothes. Sometimes we didn't have breakfast or lunch. There were six of us children, so everyone knew about our family. The teachers knew what was going on at home; some cared, but most didn't. There was one teacher who brought us food, but that made it worse, because the other children would point us out and say we were getting favouritism. We were teased because of our family and I was excluded because I was in the special class, but it's all rolled into one. (research conversation, November 2010)

Edith recalls being held back in Grade 1, repeating the year. The following year, Edith and her sister were removed from the home due to concerns for their safety because of the men who visited her mother. Edith's grandfather was a Christian minister. He and his wife took the girls into their home, where Edith remained until she was 15. They cared for the girls, including caring about their school work.

I am a very determined person. I think it came from my grandparents; their place was a good place for me. My grandmother taught me how to keep house and they kept us safe and we didn't get pregnant. When I won the literacy award, I wanted to invite my grandparents to come and watch me get it; unfortunately they had passed away. I invited my sister and we became close because of it. My mom was so jealous, she is always jealous of my accomplishments. I don't know why. I guess because it was attention not focussed on her. My twin brother is not like that, he wants to see my awards and show them around. (research conversation, November 2009)

When Edith was in Grade 3 or 4, she was put into a special class.

The children didn't treat me very nice in that class. They made fun of me. The afternoon teachers would make me stand up and read and the other children would laugh. I was in the front row and I could feel them laughing into my back, but still I had to do it, to read. It belittles you and you learn to do anything to avoid it. In the morning class there were fewer children and they were all different ages. There were children with bad behaviour and other children who had trouble reading and learning. (research conversation, November 2009)

Edith remained in the special education classroom for the rest of her elementary school years. Between Grades 4 and 8, she reported to the same classroom each morning and was

instructed by the same teacher, a woman Edith liked very much. Each afternoon, Edith and her classmates were integrated with students in regular classrooms. When asked to share her stories of her life in the special education classroom, Edith told the following stories.⁴⁸

Sandra: Did you know about the special education class before you were assigned to it?

Edith: I knew there was a smaller class, but I didn't know why. There was only one special class in the entire school. Once I was sent to it, I stayed there, until I left for high school.

Sandra: Did you mix with other classes?

Edith: Every afternoon they sent us out to join the regular classes. When we walked out the door of our classroom, into the hallway, we knew to stick together. The children in the special education class were singled out because we were not part of the group. When we entered their classrooms, they were like, we're better than you, or your parents are, type of conversations. We stuck together because it kept us safer.

Sandra: At recess what did you do?

Edith: We stuck together, we were a group. We would ask the teacher, "Can we stay in? Can we wash the boards? Can we straighten the shelves?" If she said no, we sometimes hid in the bathroom (this comment was shared in a whisper). It was so hard when they got us. Sometimes my group would tell the teacher outside and she would do something if she liked us. We were a group, all different ages, but still a group. When we had to go out we stuck together.

Sandra: Were there differences between what you experienced in the morning and what you experienced in the afternoon?

Edith: Sometimes I got in trouble in the morning class because the children would tease me by saying I could not live with my family and remind me my mother was a drunk. There was

⁴⁸ In this next section I included both sides of our dialogue. I have done so purposely because Collins (1991) reminds me "dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and object. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination" (p. 212).

one boy, he was older than me and in some way he was related to me so he knew a lot about my family. I used to get into arguments with him because he was always saying mean stuff. One time they called home and my grandfather had to come to school. It was like when we left the class we knew we had to stick together to protect ourselves but once inside our classroom we nipped each other and teased each other ⁴⁹(research conversation, October, 2011).

As Edith shared her stories, I conjured up images of school. It was not long, however, when I realized the images and stories I was remembering were based on my experiences as teacher and tutor. I felt a dissonance between my stories of teaching and tutoring and the stories Edith was sharing with me. I read Connelly and Clandinin (1988) and was reminded “it is not only the people but the things and processes that have a history Both the things and processes therefore must also be thought of as having a history” (p. 8). I understand these sentences to mean that all situations are historical, therefore I began to wonder about the educational policies which were in place when Edith was a child living upon and between school and home landscapes. Greene (2001) reminded me “I was trying to tap, I soon realized, the historical record and vantage points with respect to what might be taken to be the record. I was trying to make somehow audible silenced voices; I was trying to make visible invisible faces” (p. 27).

Edith’s final report card from elementary school contained the following comment from her teacher, a woman Edith liked and respected. She had been Edith’s teacher each morning during the 4 or 5 years she spent in the special education class. Edith felt the woman worked to make her and the other children in the class feel special.

⁴⁹ During a research conversation (June, 13, 2011) as we negotiated this text, Edith commented, “Reading this makes me feel these things happened just the other day.”

“Edith you have done well this year. I’ll certainly miss your good sense and helping hand next year. I wish you all the best and I know you will give the teachers at B.B.I. (the high school Edith would attend) all the co-operation you have given us. Don’t forget to ask for help, they can’t help if you don’t ask.”⁵⁰ Good luck Edith” (Edith’s final elementary report card, n.d.).

Edith’s grades from her final elementary school report card are listed below. It is interesting to note not only was she given a letter grade, in Edith’s case a steady stream of As, the teacher also noted her grade level. In September of Grade 8, she had an oral reading score of (4.0); in June the score rose to (4.3). Moreover, in mathematics, Edith had a significantly smaller gap between her score (6.0 in September and 6.4 in June) and scores one would expect for a student completing eighth grade (8.0 and 8.10).

Term	1	2	3
Language Arts			
Oral Reading	A (grade 4.0)	A	A (grade 4.3)
Reading Comprehension	A (grade 4.0)	A	A (grade 4.3)
Phonics	A	A	A
Mathematics	A (grade 6.0)	A	A (grade 6.4)
Writing	A	A	A
Spelling	A (grade 6.3)	A	A (grade 6.10)

⁵⁰ As we negotiated this text, Edith laughed when she read the comment about asking for help. When I asked her why, she commented, “I regularly tell my daughter if she needs it, she should always ask for help.” (research conversation, June 2011)

Edith Attends High School

Prior to Edith entering high school, there were federal and provincial initiatives underway which shaped her secondary school experiences. One of these initiatives was directed by the Federal Government and was entitled, the Technical and Vocational Training Assistance Act of 1960. Goard (1965) described the act as “financial assistance to the provinces to develop technical and vocational services within the provincial educational systems” (p. 396). Part of this act made federal dollars available to increase the number of technical-vocational training programs available to high school students. John Robarts, then the Ontario Provincial Minister of Education, welcomed the federal dollars while introducing an overhauled high school curriculum, which became known as the “Robarts Plan”. At the time, the provincial government was struggling to cope with increasing birthrates (baby-boom era), immigration, increases in high school participation rates and a realization of the need for a greater number of high school graduates. The Robarts Plan changed Ontario Secondary Schools by introducing streaming. Three streams were available: a 2-year course designed to prepare students to leave school and enter the workforce, a 4-year program which included vocational training, and the 5-year academic pathway which prepared students to attend university. Smaller (2000) wrote:

Streaming works to sort and divide youth Ironically, this force is supported in large part through the ideology of ‘scientifically’ determined, ‘objectively’ measured, levels of ‘intelligence’ or ‘ability’—supposedly neutral, objective criteria, which nevertheless, results in significant social separation in our schools and in our society on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual, and physical ability. (p. 3)

Because Edith had been identified as a struggling reader in early elementary and then placed into a special education class, the next step for her, according to the Robarts Plan, was the

2-year program of study; it was labelled the occupational class and in part it included vocational training.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (1987) defined vocational education as education which "is specifically directed toward the teaching of skills and knowledge which are useful in occupations for which post-secondary education is not required and which may help graduating students qualify for entry-level positions in those occupations" (CTF, 1987, p. 5). Benavot (1983) argued vocational training of high school students was in part purposeful because it was seen as a way to support the proper socialization of citizens within a democracy while allowing equal educational opportunities. Moreover he said, vocational training, supports a stratified, class based society because it produces "semi-educated workers sensitive to capitalist work values" (p. 66).

Edith's school experiences were also shaped by the Hall-Dennis Report, *Living and Learning: The Report of the Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario* (1968) which was released to the province and to school boards. In this report, among other things, there was a call to provide for all students. The report described "the right of every individual to have equal access to the learning experience best suited to his needs, and the responsibility of every school authority to provide a child centred learning continuum that invites learning by individual discovery and inquiry" (p. 208). While this report was met with cheers by groups advocating for the provision of programs to meet the needs of specific students, particularly those students with learning disabilities, the report did not mandate boards of education to offer special education programs and services. It was not until December of 1980 when the province of Ontario passed an amendment to the Education Act which mandated school boards to provide programs for students with learning disabilities and by this time Edith had left

school. The change to the Education Act grew out of Ontario Human Rights Code, which affirmed the right to equal access to services, including education. It was not, however, until 1982 that legislation was passed provincially which made discrimination on the basis of *handicap* illegal. These legal changes were too late for Edith. She left high school after 2 years with a Certificate of Training and an exit report card inscribed with two types of comments. One set of comments reflects her excellent work habits and the second group notes a steady increase in the number of missed classes. These absences coincide with Edith's return to her maternal home at the age of 15. She returned home to care for her younger brothers.

Imagining Edith living on school landscapes, I am struck by the layers of stories which perhaps influenced her stories to live by. Edith's early stories of school were influenced by the work of policy writers and politicians, who did not mandate school boards to provide programs to meet her needs; she also lived out her school stories when inclusion was not the order of the day. Moreover, I imagine some of the words which, during her time of school attendance, were used to name students with exceptionalities: handicapped child, slow, backwards, and retarded were common. In keeping with the American Psychological Association's direction these phrases have been replaced with students who have special needs: person first, disability second; however none of this benefited Edith⁵¹. Adding another layer of complexity to Edith's stories of school were two alcoholic parents. Edith described herself and her siblings as *shunned and outcasts*. Because we live on a storied landscape, I imagine Edith's stories of home found their way to school. She spoke about her teachers,

⁵¹During a research conversation (June, 21, 2011) when negotiating this narrative account, Edith commented that the labelling of children has not changed since she was a child. She made this comment when sharing a story of school personnel and their attempts to label her child.

I had some good ones; some cared about what was happening to you outside of school, mostly though they didn't care. Some wanted to know why I wasn't like my sister and brothers who were in regular class. The teacher I had in elementary school, she was good; she knew I could do the work if someone read it to me. I had one friend and she read and I said the answers and then we would write it down. Together we could do it, her reading and my comprehension. They stereotyped us; we were the children of that family. (research conversation, November 2009).

Through all of her schooling Edith remembers feeling frustrated because she understood what was asked of her, however, **she could not read**⁵². She said, "I liked learning and school was good because it was a place to go, but I could not understand why I wasn't reading and the teachers were not helping me to read" (research conversation, November 2009).

When Edith was asked to share stories of her high school experiences she offered the following.

Edith: Being in the special education class affected me more once I got to high school. In high school there were regular classes and the lower, special classes. We were together in the same building, often in the same classrooms, just at different times. I remember waiting in the hall for them to finish and then we would go in. One day when we were waiting to enter, this girl from the regular class walked up to me and slapped me across the face. I guess I had done something to bug her, but I don't know what it was. I was pretty good, I knew not to say anything when they were coming out of classes or passing us in the hallways. She just came up to me and smacked me right across the face.

⁵² I decided to set this text apart by using bold font, because I believe it is a powerful comment.

Sandra: Did you ever give it back?⁵³

Edith: We would just say, “Why are you doing this?” We couldn’t give it back because we would get stepped on. It was okay for them to give it to us, but not okay for us to give it back. You couldn’t win because they were stronger than we were. They had their friends and we had ours. If I would have said something to that girl, her friends would have told me, I was nothing. How dare you speak to her, you are nothing. Take what you are given and that’s it. Like on Valentine’s Day, see how many Valentines you got in your little pouch. (research conversation, November 2010)

At the age of 15, Edith made the decision to leave her grandparents and return to her mother’s home. When asked about this decision in relation to some of the remarks inscribed on her final high school report card which makes reference to an increasing number of missed classes, Edith offered the following:

Edith: I had younger brothers, Edward and Gregory⁵⁴. They were my brothers. I didn’t have them, but they were my brothers; I looked after them. They were primary school age. I went back home willingly to help. I guess it was because I thought it would be a responsibility I could give them, something my mom never did. Why should these children suffer because we have a drunken mom who doesn’t care two shits about anyone except herself? My grandparents didn’t like me going, but I knew right from wrong.

⁵³ I asked Edith this question because we are close in age, grew up in the same general area and attended schools governed by the same Education Act. I asked her this question because I often did the tormenting. Students from the special education class joined us for gym, health, art and music classes and I and some of my classmates were merciless in the torment we inflicted. Moreover, we had a gym teacher who laughed along with us.

⁵⁴ While negotiating this narrative account during a research conversation, (June, 2011), Edith commented that because her reading skills were so low, the only thing she could give her brothers was mothering and so she did. She could not help them with their school work, but she got them up in the morning, fed them and got them to school.

Sandra: I am wondering if the same concern which existed when you were seven was still present.

Edith: Most of the girls my age were pregnant or married. I was responsible. I knew right from wrong, my grandparents taught me that. I had a job. I went to school. I kept the house. I looked after my brothers. I took over the mothering. I knew they were not giving me the situation at school to help me learn to read. I went to Grade 10 and got the certificate saying I completed the program. The grades were not good, but when your home life isn't good and they are not doing anything which helps you learn to read, what was the point? The teachers said, "Her home life is not good and there is no home help, so why should we help her, why should we care? No one cares for her at home, why should we care?" I know it's no excuse for what I did. Maybe if I did stay longer, I would have gotten smarter.⁵⁵ (research conversation, November 2010)

After High School

Edith was promoted from the 2-year program. Subsequently, she worked at a number of manual labour jobs. Following the example of some of her friends, Edith moved to a city in western Canada. Here she met and married her husband. During the early years of her marriage, she worked as a night cleaner at a University Hospital. At one point, management, satisfied with Edith's work, approached her about taking on the night supervisor position. When she was asked, she told management of her difficulties with reading. Reading and writing were important elements of the job because daily communication was mandatory. The hospital worked on three shifts and Edith had to report to a supervisor she never saw, therefore communication both ways had to be written and read. During a conversation, Edith offered she could meet the demands for

⁵⁵ While negotiating this narrative account, (research conversation June, 2011) Edith commented it had been her experience that she and her daughter had been stereotyped. Edith told her daughter's teachers she was learning to read and she believes in response to her honesty they stereotyped her child as one who would not learn to read.

communication by using a tape recorder allowing her to report and receive instructions. This plan was accepted and Edith became a supervisor, however, she resigned from this position after a short while when she began to encounter jealousy from colleagues who could read and who had not been offered the job.

Edith never believed she would have a baby because she could not read. When she realized she was pregnant, she knew she had to learn. This desire was made more compelling because she was involved in a motor vehicular accident which put an immediate end to her career as a manual labourer and set in motion a journey into chronic pain, which she continues to endure today. As part of the medical treatment following her accident, Edith was referred to a psychologist for a psycho-educational workup. In this report, which Edith shared with me, it was noted that she was of average intelligence,

it must be stressed that since she had average to above average performance in three of the five subtests, that her potential abilities, including the fact that she cannot read or write would indicate average intellectual abilities The scores as suggested here would certainly not have required such a dramatic special education intervention during her early years in Ontario. I suggest . . . she was inappropriately placed. (consulting psychologist report, May 1985)

Her family doctor suggested she attend adult literacy classes.

Edith is a Mother

When Edith's daughter was born, she understood she was responsible for her child. She shared an experience she had when her daughter was 12. Martina was feeling unwell, so a friend took them to a walk-in clinic. When the doctor examined Martina, he sent them directly to the hospital because he suspected meningitis. The doctors at the hospital wanted to do a spinal tap;

however this required Edith to sign a permission form which was dense with medical vocabulary and a list of potential risks to the patient. Edith understood her child was gravely ill. She was overwhelmed by the idea of signing the consent form because she understood if she signed it and something went wrong, it would be her fault. Edith sat with her friend, who read the form aloud and attempted to explain it. Edith did not want to sign the form; however, a decision had to be made. In the end she signed it because she knew she was responsible for her child and she did not want her to suffer. Edith shared this story a number of times over the course of the study (research conversation, November 2009, January 2010, June 2011). Each time she shared it I experienced a tiny portion of the angst and uncertainty she described because it manifested itself in the relational space between us. Because of her reading problems, Edith understood there would be times when she needed help parenting Martina. For example, when she had questions about her daughter's health, she went to a medical practitioner and asked for help. When Martina entered puberty, Edith sought out information to best help her daughter as she experienced puberty. As I have come to know Edith, it has been my experience that she continues to attend to her daughter's wellbeing and she continues to ask for help when she needs it.

Edith and Our Study

At the time our study began, Edith had been participating in weekly adult literacy tutorials for 15 years. Over time as her literacies improved she was invited to tutor other adults who wanted to improve their literacies. During our 90-minute meetings, three times a week, we came to know one another through the stories we lived and shared, through the experiences of our developing relationship. Our shared experiences included tension⁵⁶. In the following section, I write about two tension-filled experiences which arose as we lived alongside one another. I

⁵⁶ Clandinin et al. (2006) described tension as "... moments and places where stories to live by bumped up against... others' stories to live by" (p. 35).

have selected these moments because they are complex. By complex I mean to suggest the stories were nested one within the other and within institutional, cultural, familial and other stories and plotlines. Furthermore, when we inquired into them we began to identify and understand how other stories were shaping the tension. Moreover, they were complex because they developed through time (past, present and future). I also selected these stories because they afforded opportunities to (Woolf, 1925)⁵⁷ examine assumptions and therefore represented moments to learn and affordances to interrupt and shift stories to live by (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999).

Moments of Tension as Opportunities to Other Ways of Knowing

We had been tutoring for two weeks when I spoke with Edith and Bella about keeping a journal. I hoped the journals would become a place where they would work at getting their thoughts down, a place where they would write generatively. I also envisioned the journals as a place where we could think about and discuss our writing. From her earliest told stories of school, and throughout 15 years of tutoring, Edith described the frustration she experienced when she could not get her thoughts down on paper. I wanted to initiate a process where we could think about putting ideas down. When I spoke about journals, Edith regularly reminded me of her inability to get her thoughts down and of her frustration. She was happy to talk to me and she offered to speak into a tape recorder because she said there was a big difference between what she could say and what she could write. She also said spelling was very difficult for her and sometimes she made so many mistakes, she could not read what she had written (tutoring sessions, November & December 2009). Nevertheless, I purchased notebooks and stored them in my backpack. I carried them around, waiting for what I perceived as an opportune moment to

⁵⁷ Woolf (1925) wrote “Habit and lethargy have dulled his palate . . . to sting us wide awake and fix us in a trance which is not sleep but rather an intensification of life—a basking, with every faculty alert.”

introduce them. I waited for a day when both women had not commented on any of the side effects of their chronic illnesses. When the day arrived, both women wanted to know precisely what they *should* write into the notebooks. I suggested they could write about anything. This was an insufficient answer. Edith needed details. I offered that they could write about what they were reading, about their day, and how they filled it. They could ask me questions or comment on anything. Both women said they would give it a try. I then reached into my bag and took out the notebooks and so began an out-of-class conversation, a lived curriculum (Aoki, 1993) with Edith. Initially, my plan for the journals was as follows.

1. I hoped the journals would be a place where the women could write about their lives and in so doing, practice getting their thoughts down on paper.
2. I would not write in the journals. I did not want to draw forward stories where the women's writing had been criticised or marked up in red pen.
3. I would respond to the journals, however, I would write letters. I imagined these letters purposeful in that they would be a platform from which I could cheer for the women and a place to practice reading.
4. I told the women to write in pen. I also asked them not to look words up because I did not want them slowing down to look words up or to take time erasing.
5. When rereading their work, the women should ask themselves: can I read and understand what I have written? If they answered yes, then they ought to let the writing stand.

Transcript from the day I introduced the journals: December, 2009.

Sandra: Today I am going to give you a pen and a journal. The purpose of the journal is to provide you with a place to get your ideas down on paper. You can write

anything you want in it. I don't want you to write in pencil first and then transfer it to pen and I don't want you to use a dictionary to look up the correct spelling of words. Also, I only want you to write in pen. Be guided by one thing; after you've written a sentence, read it back, if it makes sense, let it stand.

Edith: Can we look words up in the dictionary?

Sandra: No.

Edith: We can't look the words up? You're taking all the fun out of it.

Sandra: No I am not taking the fun out of it. The focus of this is writing, not spelling.

It's for your eyes only. If you choose to share it I will be privileged and honoured, but it's for you. This journal is a place to work at getting your ideas, hopes, feelings or whatever you want down on paper.

Edith: Do we have to write or can we print?

Sandra: It's your journal, you can choose to print or write.⁵⁸

Edith: You know I am a perfectionist and I hate this. I like my things organized. I can't do this journal. I tried before, other tutors asked me to keep a journal, and it never worked. It just worked to get me frustrated.

Sandra: Will you give it a try?

Edith: Yes.

Sandra: Thank you!

From Edith's response I learned she had tried to write in a journal in the past at the request of other tutors and in her words, "it never worked" but it did frustrate her. Later in the

⁵⁸ It strikes me as ironic that I was insisting the journals belonged to the women and I said they could do with them as they wanted, however, I also mandated they must use pen and not look words up (research conversation, June 2011).

day (tutoring session, December 2009), I listened to the recording of the tutoring session and made the following field note:

Edith had what I experienced as a strong negative reaction to the journal request. When she was describing her previous experiences with the journals, her voice got louder and I pulled back from what I perceived as conflict. Now I am remembering her sharing stories of the frustration she experiences because she cannot get her thoughts down on paper.⁵⁹ I am also recalling her expressed desire to improve her literacies. I am apprehensive because I don't want to push my agenda as the single correct way to proceed with the tutoring and I want to be respectful of the temporality of her journal frustration and her previous efforts. I am also mindful that her reaction is drawing forward my stories of conflict and my desire to avoid it. Part of me wants to let it go, however, I believe strong writing literacies allows one to express who one is and to imagine who one might become. Moreover, I think writing is important because it helps one to explain complex issues, while preserving them so one can reflect on them later. Finally, I think writing is important because it helps one to develop and extend one's thinking and creativity. On the one hand then is my desire to avoid the conflict and on the other hand, is my personal practical knowledge which values generative, independent writing. I will therefore, gently advocate for the continuation of journal writing. I hope I will be aided by Edith's desire to be a "good student", one who always completes her homework.

⁵⁹ As we negotiated this text during a research conversation (June 2011), Edith shared a story of her frustration with writing. Following a car accident she was involved in, lawyers told her to keep a daily journal of what was happening; particularly she was to document in writing those things she could no longer do. There was a 3-year lapse between the accident and when a settlement was paid out. During this time, Edith was instructed to keep a journal, something she simply could not do. This was very frustrating to Edith because she understood her case would have been much stronger and the payout higher if she had been able to document her disabilities.

In the section which follows I include entries from Edith's journal, parts of the response letters I gave to her when I returned the journal, snippets of discussion from our research conversations and field notes I made.

"I stoped my jural (journal) at 11pm and read awhile, Dingoes at Dinnertime, chapters, 4 to 9. I was tird (tired). I felt happy went to bed. I woke up with a nightmere (bad tream) at 1:49. I wanted to do sumthing else (book) so I started to write in my jur (journal). I will read for awhile to try to get back to sleep." (Edith's personal journal, December 2009)

This is precisely how the writing appeared. Edith could not tolerate having written a word (in pen, at my insistence) she knew was wrong once she saw it on the page. The words in brackets were the words she looked up in the dictionary. She didn't want to appear as if she cheated therefore she explained how she proceeded.

The following day she wrote:

I had a very bad night. I got up with my dauther and then she went to work. I went back to bed before I went for my class. I was telling Rico⁶⁰ about my bream. I also told her about the journal that I am writing that Sandra asked us to do. She thought it was a very good idela (idea). I told Rico that I did not like to write a journal. I was asked to write a journal a couple of times before but it was very hard for me. I fend it very frustrating for me. But I thought I would give it a chance. Rico thought I did well to try. I am very happy I am going to the University for classes. I can learn alot from Sandra. I get very excide about our class. I tell everybody about them. I find I am getting more cumful with my spelling. (Edith's journal, December 2009)

⁶⁰ Rico is a pseudonym for the adult literacy tutor which Edith met with weekly.

When I read this entry, I was again reminded of her frustration with the journal. Her current frustration was linked to previous experiences she had when asked to keep a journal. I considered the temporality of her frustration. I wondered about others who had requested that she keep a journal. I was concerned because according to Edith, she had never moved beyond frustration. Reading this entry helped keep me awake to that frustration. Moreover, she had not simply expressed her frustration in class and in her journal; she had also shared it with Rico, her adult literacy centre tutor.⁶¹ This heightened my sensitivity to the issue and it made me wonder again about my decision to proceed with the journals. It is also important to note that at this point in the study, we were not long into our relational journey. I did not want my insistence with the journals to be the reason Edith left the study.⁶² I did not know her well enough to know how hard I might push. While I was concerned I might be pushing too hard, I also understood Edith was happy to be coming to the university for tutoring.⁶³ I wondered about her happiness at coming for tutoring alongside her frustration with the journals. I hoped her happiness was greater than her frustration.

⁶¹ As we negotiated this narrative account, (June 20, 2011) during a research conversation, Edith remembered feeling shut down when I asked her to keep a journal. Edith said she would have preferred to do anything other than journal writing. She remembered asking me for worksheets instead of the journal writing task.

⁶² One of the issues I struggled with as I prepared for my candidacy examination was the issue of an alongside relationship with research participants. I was not confident of my ability to stay the course; I worried I would behave in ways which caused the relationship to fracture.

⁶³ As we negotiated this narrative account during a research conversation (June 13, 2011), Edith said that initially she had felt honoured that someone recognized her for who she is and for the hard work she has done to improve her literacies. She felt I was seeing her not as a statistic. She never thought she would ever do something at a university. During the study, she was a university student and this was important because none of her siblings went to the university. She had never thought of going because she did not have enough education, even though she graduated from a high school program. Edith commented that being asked to come to the university for the study was the biggest gift someone ever gave to her.

In late December 2009 Edith wrote me a letter in her journal.

To Sandra

When you asked us to write a journal I was hesitant about it. I that (thought) it was a good idea at the time. But the more I worked on the journal I hated it. I found that I couldn't put my complete thoughts on paper. I could put down simple details of what I did but not my true feelings in my hart (heart). That mnade my frustrated with myself and not being to use a dictionary and writing with a pen. I wouold have rather done bookwork then the journal. I evern stopped my personal reading for a while. That made me mad. That is not like me, not to read at night. I did do the short stories you gave me and the book, Trapped in the Ice. My touter and I sat down and wrote this letter to you because she know how frustrated I was by doing the journal. And my vertigo did not help me, either. (Edith's journal, December 2009)

When I read this entry/letter I experienced the weight and intensity of Edith's feelings towards the journal: frustration and hatred. Her letter also reminded me that the journal was a complex issue which was influencing the relational space between us. Writing in pen, not using the dictionary, not being able to get her feelings down on paper, and negative influences on her night time reading were not things I imagined when I introduced the journals and yet they were nested within my request. I was also taken by the fact she was sharing our tension with another tutor. Knowing this made me think about the power deferential which exists between researcher and participant. I knew I was meant to be in "for the long haul . . . working towards intimacy of relationship" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 78), however Edith's sharing our tension with her other tutor reminded me our relationship was in the midst, in the making. Fortunately, I thought about the list of research-related wonders I routinely brought with me to my weekly supervisory

meeting with Jean and how in the space between Jean and me we wondered. This allowed me to step back from my reaction to knowing Edith was sharing our relationship with others. Instead I read the letter and Rico's embedded comments as support for the journal and more importantly support for Edith. As my understanding of the complexities nested within Edith's desire to expand her literacies deepened, I reflected on the African proverb, it takes a village to raise a child. I am not suggesting Edith is a child, rather, the more complex an issue, the better served one is to have broad-based support. Edith's letter allowed me to know Rico as part of that support, just as Jean was supporting me.

In response to Edith's journal entry I wrote her the following letter.⁶⁴

I wanted to speak a little bit about the frustration you experienced writing the journal. Let me begin by saying if you are more comfortable using a pencil please feel free to do so. Moreover, if you would like to use a dictionary, again feel free to do so. The purpose of the journal is to provide you with a space to write about things that are happening, questions you have about tutoring, things you are wondering about or anything at all you choose to write about. There is no one way to use the journal. It was not my purpose or hope that the process would frustrate you and for that I apologise. I hope you will continue to write in your journal and share your thinking with me. Thank you for taking the time to write me a letter to express your frustration with the journal. I am completely confident that in the not too distant future you will be more than able to take the thoughts from your mind and from your speech and put them down on paper in exactly the form

⁶⁴ Each time Edith handed me her journal, I kept it overnight and returned it to her with a letter. In the letter I reflected on things she had written and things her writing brought to mind. Initially I imagined these letters would provide me with an opportunity to cheer for the women. In writing the first letter, this imagined purpose was present; however, over time and with guidance from Jean, I understood it was so much more. It was a rich, out-of-classroom, private conversation. A place where I reflected on what I was learning: our study, my teaching and my increasing awareness of the importance of the relational. Jean helped me to shift my understanding of the journals.

you feel represents your ideas, creativity and imagination. (My response letter, January 2010)

I hoped the above letter would ease the tension, however, entries from early January 2010 introduced new layers of complexity associated with the journal writing.

In January, 2010 Edith wrote:

Dear Diary, I know it's been 3 weeks since my last entry, but my thoughts are important to write in my Journal. I know Sandra likes to read what I am about. I know I can write her anything and she always will write it back to me. I started back at the university for my classes. They mean a lot to me too go to the class on Mon, Tues, Thurs. (Edith's journal, January 2010).

And she also wrote, "I wanted to say I like the letter Sandra wrote to me. The letter meant all to me. I know Sandra can understand my sayings. I have to get more confidence in myself. I have to stop saying that I cannot do things and try my very best work. I can do it" (Edith's journal, January 2010).

Another day she wrote, "I have to try very hard to keep up with my journal. It is very important for me to keep it up" (Edith's journal, February 2010).

I hoped these entries represented a shift in how Edith experienced the journals. I suspect I was hopeful because I was experiencing Edith's frustration as a steady stream of tension which I found worrisome. I could not, however, ignore that Edith felt she had to write in the journal every day and when she did not, she got upset. This allowed me to wonder about what it might be like to have thoughts and not be able to move the thoughts from my body to the page. I also thought deeply about the work teachers assign and how said work is experienced by students. Increasingly, I was awakening to the complexities of journal writing.

In my slumber, in my arrogance and privilege I never once imagined the journals would draw so many stories forward. Many times it felt like the journals held the potential to derail me, our study, our relationship and the work we were doing. I felt rattled, unsure of myself as a teacher, as a woman, and as one who increasingly knew Edith as friend. At this point I wanted to pass on the journals. I did not want to continue my participation in an activity which was causing Edith so much frustration and which was causing me to experience a steady stream of conflict. I had a discussion with Jean and she spoke of the journals as a conversation, something I had never considered before. She suggested Edith was speaking with me through the journals and I was speaking back in my response letters. Framing the journals this way allowed me to shift who I was as I read and responded to Edith's writing. Knowing the journal as a conversational space allowed me to read Edith's writing from a shifted positioning. No longer was I positioned as tutor and researcher, I was also increasingly her trusted friend. This allowed me to trust our developing friendship and to read some of what she wrote without feeling as if my personal practical knowledge was under siege.⁶⁵

In early February 2010 Edith introduced another layer of complexity with the journals.

I wanted to work on my journal so I could keep up and not fall behind again. I am wondering if what I am writing in my journals is what Sandra wants. I have more say but can't put it on paper. (Edith's journal, February 2010)⁶⁶

⁶⁵ During a research conversation (June 20, 2011), as we negotiated this narrative account, Edith expressed her understanding of how the journals shifted from a teacher-student job to a conversation between friends.

⁶⁶ During a research conversation (June 20, 2011), as we negotiated this narrative account, Edith spoke about a tension she experienced with the journals as she attempted to discern whether I wanted a factual recall of her daily events, which seemed like a task a teacher might ask of a student, or did I want her to write more personally about her feelings. She felt the latter was more what a friend might write to another friend in a letter. Because I had set parameters, no pencil, no dictionary use, Edith initially felt she was writing from the position of student, however, over time this line blurred as she began sharing her feelings. The more she did of this type of writing, the easier it got.

It had not occurred to me to categorise Edith's journal entries as writing I wanted and writing I did not want. When I read the above entry, I wondered how my instructions might have contributed to the frustration Edith was experiencing. When I gave the instructions for what to write in the journal, I was purposefully broad and vague. I wanted the women to write about those things which were meaningful to them. I considered this entry through the lens of the relational and I wondered if perhaps Edith was finding her way in our friendship as I was.

A few days later, during one of our tutoring sessions (February 2010) Edith was sharing one of her journal entries. She read a piece about the things she was learning and how she was able to share her learning when she was helping her daughter and when she was tutoring other students. When she finished reading, she said, "I know confidence is spelled wrong".

I replied, "Remember Edith, the journal is not a spelling test. You read the word, it was correct, the sentence made sense and the paragraph was outstanding. I really liked how you wrote about sharing your learning with your daughter and with the students you tutor. When I was thinking about our study, it never occurred to me you might take your learning home and help your child and other students. I find that incredibly exciting".

Edith: Yeah I know, but it bugs me so much to see it down there on the page and know it is wrong. Also, I know I have to get away from using I like. I know there are so many other words. I am confident with I like and I know how to spell I like. I know there are so many other words in the dictionary. Now I have to get away from using the same words.

Sandra: It is exciting to hear you talk about your writing in this way.

Edith: When I look in the dictionary, sometimes I am looking for other words. You know they have other words in there that mean the same.

Sandra: My concern is it slows the writing down. I am not against the dictionary, it slows you down. It interrupts your writing.⁶⁷

Edith: I know, I know we are trying to better ourselves. So I will keep trying to write in the journal. (tutoring session, February 2010).

This was the first time Edith spoke about considering word choice. It was also the first time she explained her repetitive use of the phrase “I like.” Moreover, it was the first time she discussed her dictionary usage as not only a place where she checked her spelling but also a place where she searched for synonyms. In this exchange, she moved away from a single themed narrative which consistently storied frustration and writing under a single banner and began to talk about how to make her writing better. This was a significant shift in our journal-related conversations.

Writing, the getting down of her thoughts on paper was for Edith the most difficult challenge she faced as she worked to improve her literacies. Up to this point, she repeatedly expressed her frustrations and reminded me she had already tried journal writing and it had not worked. She believed there were two elements interfering with her writing. The first element is her difficulty with spelling and the second is the movement of full, detailed thinking from her mind to the paper. My journal writing instructions added to Edith’s writing difficulties, making them more complex. In the above exchange, however, Edith openly pushed against my no dictionary edict and simultaneously explained her actions and thinking. She also acknowledged her willingness to continue with the writing. I thought about her willingness to continue with her journal writing through the relational space we were creating and I understood we were in the

⁶⁷During a research conversation (June, 20, 2011), Edith commented on the number of times teachers had recommended, insisted, and encouraged her to use a dictionary and now here I was insisting she NOT use it; this was therefore a tension. Edith said she did not like being told not to use a dictionary because she really likes them.

midst of creating trust. Edith felt sufficiently comfortable to push back against my journal writing instructions, to make her feelings known while continuing to move forward with her journal writing. In our shared stories, including the tension filled moments, we were creating a foundation of friendship. It was also the last time Edith outwardly expressed her frustration with the journal writing.⁶⁸

This entry appeared a few days later.

I have to start and believe in myself that I can do the work and if I make a mistake it is ok. I should fockes on the work I am doing now rather than on the past. I feel if something is bothering me I should confront the problem and get it solved. (January 2010)

In response to the above entry I wrote the following letter.

Edith, I wanted to tell you I was deeply moved by what you shared the other day. Let me explain. I know journal writing is difficult. What moved me so deeply was your willingness to discuss it the following day and that you had shifted the story from one that had power over you to one you have power over. When you said you have to remind yourself, that was then and this is now, I was stunned by your courage and your confidence and your willingness to tell a different story. Please know I am cheering for you. Finally, I wanted to invite you to use the journal to discuss anything. If something is troubling in class, please feel free to write to me about it” (response letter, January 2010).

As Edith and I continued our remarkable journal conversation, I was not receiving any writing from Bella. When asked about it, she would say that she would try; however, the journal was not handed in. Every couple of days she observed Edith handing in her journal and the

⁶⁸ Edith commented she reached a point where she ignored my journal writing rules and focussed on getting her thoughts and feelings done on paper (research conversation, June 20, 2011).

following day I handed it back. Some days I did not have a chance to read the journal overnight and therefore I would arrive to class unprepared to hand it back. In early February, Edith commented on this in her journal. She said, “I do not like it when I don’t have my journal” (Edith’s journal, February 2010).

I apologised for my tardiness and suggested I purchase a second journal so she would always have something to write in. Edith was agreeable to this. At our next meeting, I handed her the second journal, which she gratefully received. Bella sat quietly and observed. A few days later, during a research conversation I noted another shift in Edith’s comments about the journal writing.

I got to the university and I did not see Bella on the bench. Then she came and I did her card deck⁶⁹ with her. I was talking with her about the journal. I told her at first I did not like doing the journal. I told her people asked me to do a journal and I did not do it. I told Bella that I thought it was good for Sandra’s research to help her to know us better (research conversation, March 2010).

When I listened to this research conversation, I experienced it as a movement away from Edith being concerned with what I want to read and what I don’t want to read. I read it as Edith’s increasing willingness to let herself be known, while foregrounding the relational. I also read it as Edith wanting both her and Bella to do what I asked of them. Edith often spoke of her longitudinal and meaningful relationships with tutors. Edith also spoke about our study and how it might help other women; she felt a responsibility to do her best. When I listened to this conversation, I understood Edith was attempting to support Bella on the path to journal writing.

In a response letter to Edith I wrote,

⁶⁹ The card deck was an ever-increasing pile of recipe cards with phonograms on them. Edith often helped Bella to practice her deck. The deck was purposeful in that it was a tool to practice the sound symbol relationship.

I wanted to say it has been my repeated experience that your journal entries are thoughtful and well written. It might be hard to get it down, however, the efforts are well worth it because your work is engaging to read and think about. Thank you for sharing it with me and thank you for staying with the writing. (Sandra's letter to Edith, March 2010)

I thought we had turned a page, however, the following entry reminded me once again of the complexities of tension, identities, and positioning. In early March, 2010 Edith wrote, "I have to try very hard to keep up with my journal. It is very important for me to keep it up." And a few days later,

Another week begins, my daughter goes to work, and I am going to the university again and I enjoy it a lot. I am learning a lot and I feel very good. We had a very good time. I learned a lot. I like to learn and I like the book we are reading. The book is hard but it is good to have a challenge for me. When I came home I worked on my homework. I think I did a very good job by myself. I was very proud of myself that I did it on my own.

(Edith's journal, March 2010)

When I read this entry I experienced Edith's telling stories, in which she is protagonist, as educative. At this point the stories revolve around Edith. A few days later, however, there was another shift as Edith took her relived stories out into a broader world. Edith wrote: "I wrote a letter to my doctor today. I wanted to get my thoughts on paper so if I forgot to tell the doctor something, it would be on the paper." (Edith's journal, April, 2010)

Reading this moved me deeply. I reflected upon the stories Edith told me about what it meant to her to be a woman living in urban Canada with literacies less than she desired. Repeatedly she spoke about having to rely on receptionists at medical offices to fill out forms for her. This was an ongoing issue because Edith was occasionally referred to specialists and not all

receptionists were kind when Edith requested help. Edith writing the letter to her doctor, the place where she was always reminded of her limited literacies, was significant. Edith was confident; she knew she could get her concerns down on paper.

The following day Edith and I had a research conversation and she said, “I wrote to the doctor. I have to go to the doctor. I wrote down my thoughts instead of trying to remember them at the appointment.” (research conversation, April, 2010)

And she also said:

I was always focusing on what I was in the past on what I couldn't do but now I'm focussing on okay now I can do this. I am really enjoying it, like I mean these classes mean a lot to me. They fit me, I am so focused. When I come home I have to get right away to get my home work. It's so fresh in my mind I want to get my thoughts right down right. (research conversation, April, 2010)

When Edith shared this I was struck by the final two sentences. Her desire to get her thoughts down on paper and at the same moment she includes getting them down right or correctly. I appreciated she was excited by this, however, I wondered about the lingering idea that thoughts can be written down in one correct or right format.

When I asked her to speak about the journal she said:

That's exciting for me. Like many times tutors have asked me to do a journal. I would start it but I would never finish it off. I would never. I would do it a couple days and that would be it. But for you, you read it and give me input on it and it's really good to get your input. I'm thinking you're not marking spelling mistakes and you're not writing in red pen. You focus on what I'm writing down but you're not getting into the nitty-gritty.

In your letters you tell me how you're feeling about what I've writing even if sometimes I

can't go back and reread my own writing. Well that's important to me because I thought I'd never be able to put my thoughts down and someone else would be able to read it.

Does that make any sense?

Sandra: Yes it makes complete sense to me. I look forward to reading your journal entries. Your thoughts give me so much to think about and I am grateful for that.

Edith: What kinds of things do you think about?

Sandra: I think about who I am as a teacher and as a friend. I think about my daughters and what kind of parent I am and might be. I think about your life and how hard some of it seems to me. I can't imagine feeling unwell so often. I often think about how courageous you are. I am not sure I would have the courage to get up three times a week and come to the university for classes. Can you talk about that?

Edith: I can't, I can't, I can't. I don't know the words to give you because I just like coming here. I do my classes with the other tutors, Rico and May and they give me and help me but I find this, here with you and Bella, I am in heaven. I am learning so much. I tell people and I am in heaven. (research conversation, April 2010)

A few weeks later, in early May, I handed Edith's journal back to her and I did not include a response letter. I was reluctant to do so, however, I had been feeling unwell for the previous few days and I wanted to clear my desk off. Edith made no comment during tutoring; however this was part of her May 15th entry, "I am going to stop writing in my journal and start reading. I was surprised I did not get a letter from Sandra. I look forward to reading the letters Sandra gives to me when she returns my journals." I smiled when I read this. It allowed me another opportunity to know the importance of the relational and to experience another tension.

Initially, we had planned to end the study at the end of April. As this date approached, we each felt we wanted to continue. We sat down and negotiated as a group. I told Edith and Bella I would remain in town until the end of May and would be happy to continue our work until then. They both agreed they would like to continue and so we did. They also agreed they would continue our research conversations in the fall when I returned for my final year. At Bella's request, during our last month of tutoring we worked at improving their computer literacies. We wanted to continue our friendship through email. I brought laptops to class and we set up email accounts and worked at familiarizing them with retrieving their email and sending messages. I had hoped Edith and I would shift our journal conversation to an email conversation. When I left the city, I wrote to Edith every day, however our correspondence quickly faltered. When I returned to the city in the fall, I called Edith and invited her to come for a research conversation. I was delighted at the prospect of seeing her and wondered how she was and how she had been.

Over the phone she mentioned an unpleasant incident involving her daughter and a social service agency. I invited her to bring the paper work involving the incident; I offered to help. She came to my office with her daughter and she was clearly upset. Edith's daughter had applied for and was accepted into a program to help her find employment. On the second day of the training she was told she could not participate. Edith was deeply troubled by what had transpired and she came to ask if I would help her write a letter and to go over the papers she had received. I asked her if she thought about writing the letter on her own and she replied as follows:

I would not have done the letter for my daughter on my own. I have the thoughts up here, but putting it down on paper is hard. I still need help with that, but this time I knew it had to be done and I would not let it go. When it is done I will feel better because I will have accomplished something I know must be done to protect my daughter. The writing barrier

is still there but I have more confidence. I am going to do this; I am not going to think about writing the letter and then let it go. I am not pushing it to the side anymore. What they did was wrong and I must respond. It is not what I can't do. It is what I can do, sometimes with help. I am not going to say I can't do it anymore. I have the skills and I know I can do it. The barrier is like a hill. If I give myself a little boost, even if I get it wrong, it is okay. I have people out there who support me. It is not that I am on my own. I have people to help me. I do have the brains. At school they told me I didn't so I didn't know to use it.

Sandra: Edith, I imagine you were using "it". Keeping your little brothers safe, keeping your friends at school in a group and therefore safe. Whether or not the school recognized and labelled it is smart; I know it and I know you are very smart. I think of all the things you have taught me and I know you were able to do that because you are smart.

Edith: I can't see what I taught you. I look at it and I think both Bella and I taught you to be more patient. I think I taught you that but I can't see anything else.

Sandra: If someone asked me about our study I would answer quite differently from what I hear you saying.

Edith: Okay I am asking you. What have you learned from me?

Sandra: I have been a student here for 3 and a half years. Throughout that time and in particular the time I spent with you and Bella, I have learned so much about being human, about being a woman that I didn't know before. If someone asked who gained the most, I would say I have. It has been my fortune because I learned so much about the complexity of a woman's life, about how threads of identities are present when I am tutoring. They might not be immediately there in the room at the moment, but I

understand they can be called forward and influence positively or negatively what we are doing together. You have taught me to be respectful of this. I was asleep to it. I think I have learned to be a better listener. And the thing that shifted the most in terms of my identity and this is the greatest gift; I am much less judgmental than I was a year ago. To get all the way to 50 being very judgemental and then in this year with you and Bella, I know myself as less likely to judge and I think that is as good as it gets. That is huge. I was so quick to label, but you and Bella taught me not to go there first. I think first about the complexity of a life. When I think of you and Bella I see two remarkable women, both with chronic illness, who came to class all the time. I am not sure I could do that. Many of the journals have entries about you not feeling well. And still you came.

Edith (in a whisper): I guess I taught you to look outside the box? You know Sandra it took me 15 years to get to where I am reading: 15 years. If I would have done it at school, I would not have to do what I am doing. I think if I would have had your classes when I was young or when I first started with adult literacy I would not have taken 15 years. You taught us in a way that worked for me and Bella. It was a proper way for us and we caught on fast. But like I said, you can't go back. You just go forward with what you have now. It is always a struggle, when I am out there and see a person with a reading problem, I try to understand how they learn and teach them their way. Don't force your way on them, find out their way and teach it their way. It has to be their way if they are going to learn. Otherwise they won't learn, it will just be frustration for them. If I knew this back then, then I would not have to go through the sorrows that I did. My life was a big sorrow. If the teachers put this in their knowing back there and back then, I wouldn't feel so bad. I can't change it. I am still there; I can't shift from those sorrows. My shifting

is through reading books. My crying when I understand a book. My laughter when I read and understand that is my happiness, my shift.

Sandra: Has that shifting resulted in your knowing yourself differently?

Edith (quietly crying): Yes, I know I can do it now. I can get the happiness out of a book, just like another person can do. I can't shift what happened in the past but I can shift what's happening now. There is too much sorrow back there; I can't change what's back there now. I can only change what I have here. Or what my daughter has. (research conversation, September 2010)⁷⁰

When I listened to this conversation and later read the transcription I thought about Lindemann Nelson (2001) who argued “identities can be damaged and made incoherent or painful in all kinds of ways . . . master narratives cause doxastic damage—the damage of distorting and poisoning people’s self-conceptions” (p.106). Edith said she cannot shift the sorrowful stories from her childhood. Stories where she was labelled child of alcoholic-

⁷⁰ During a research conversation (June 20, 2011) as we negotiated this narrative account, Edith shared two stories of recent experiences. The first involved her dog. Edith and her daughter had been outside with their dog when a neighbour’s dog had come onto their property and bitten Edith’s dog. In response to this incident, she called the police and verbally gave a detailed description of what transpired. The woman on the phone told Edith she would have to come in and fill out a complaint form before an officer would visit the neighbour. Edith described how she felt when she heard she had to fill out a form. She said she felt like blinders had been pulled shut in front of her eyes and she was terrified. She did not want the woman to think she is stupid. She said when she gets this feeling she knows she is not part of the community; she is shunned because she can’t fill out the report. She wondered about people like her, who struggle with literacies. What do they do when they are confronted with situations where they have to read or write on demand? Edith believes fear often leads people to inaction. A second story she shared involved her desire to help a stranger and her inability to do so because of a requirement to write. Edith witnessed a vehicular accident and she was willing to report what she had seen. When an officer approached her, he said she had to write it down. When she heard this she experienced the familiar panic story and therefore had to withdraw her offer to help. She said she felt bad because she believed her observations would have gone a long way to help the driver of the bus. As we spoke about these issues, Edith raised another concern. She spoke about her tutor of so many years who recently stopped being a tutor. Edith referred to this woman as a friend and someone she could count on to help her navigate when she believed her literacies were insufficient. This woman and her help are no longer available to Edith. Her tutor from another adult literacy centre is currently attending to complex family matters and Edith does not want to disturb her. She asked me to help with the complaint forms for the dogs and I readily agreed. I made a comment about my pending departure from the province and she said, “Sandra don’t remind me.”

dysfunctional parents and stories which named her as learning disabled, which in turn facilitated her permanent placement into special education classes. Lindemann Nelson argued the connection between oppression and identity threads lies in what she referred to as master narratives. The master narratives, she argues, construct the identities which are required for the system to continue. Edith's early stories of home and school accordingly marked her as undesirable, less than, and in need of help. At the same time, these stories drew forward responses from others on the school and family landscape, responses which served to restrict the educative development of her identities.

I understand Edith's description of her emotional responses to the books she reads and her knowing she can read like other people as identity-influencing stories which she has worked to tell, retell, and relive in her efforts to shift her stories to live by. When a local author, writing about individuals who overcome adversity, asked Edith about including a chapter about her life, Edith experienced this as a shift away from less than and a tiny, temporal step within *the literate community*. Moreover, engaging with characters in books and being moved to tears of sadness or joy, Edith knows these things as the acts of a literate person. So while Edith cannot undo the sorrowful stories which damaged her identities, she can and she has struggled to tell and live other stories. Again I am reminded of the story Edith told me of an early elementary teacher insisting she stand at her desk at the front of the classroom and read aloud. Edith said the teacher knew she could not read, however she insisted Edith stand up and read. Edith spoke about feeling the laughter enter into her back and I imagine it inscribing into her body a powerfully sorrowful story which influenced and damaged her identities. When I introduced the idea of journal writing and then insisted on compliance, I imagine I drew forward Edith's knowing from this sorrowful

story. In some ways I was the teacher from elementary school, the one who demanded compliance when she knew Edith was incapable.

A Second Tension

A second place where our stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995) bumped up and came into tension was nested within our different experiences with technology. I am a comfortable and regular user of technology. As a tutor of students with learning disabilities, I see assistive technology as something that is used to increase, maintain, or improve physical ability or academic performance. I was frustrated therefore by Edith's refusal to even consider it. She repeatedly said she could not or would not make use of technology. Edith frequently reminded me she hated speaking on the phone. I imagine she offered this story so I would understand her refusal, however because this was the only story she shared, I had little data from which to inquire into her felt tension as it related to the use of technology. As I was preparing to go home for the December 2009 recess, I asked Edith about continuing the tutoring using Skype; she wanted absolutely nothing to do with it. I made this request in part because I wondered if her keen desire to continue the tutoring and her pleasure from it might mitigate her reluctance.

On another occasion I presented Edith with a small digital recorder because I wanted her to listen to herself read, privately, so she could attend to the additional sounds and words she was adding to the text. She refused. She did, however, offer to use a tape recorder she had at home. I was reluctant because I wanted to be able to transfer her reading onto my laptop and include it as field texts; I would be unable to do this if she used her tape recorder. The digital recorder I wanted to present to Edith had many more functions than what was required simply to record herself reading. Each time I asked about the use of technology, Edith bluntly refused. This created an ongoing tension for me because her refusal was interfering with the future stories I

was imagining, which had Edith as a fully engaged user of technology. Moreover, because she refused to talk about her ongoing rejection of technology, I understood it as purposeful in that it discarded technology as defective or useless. Her unwillingness to discuss it added to my frustration.

When Edith read she frequently added words and sounds which were not on the page. I suspected she was doing this, in part to give herself additional time to work at reading a particular word. We had spoken about this on a number of occasions. I talked about how it was interfering with fluency and how in part it was marking her reading as less than fluent. On three occasions I asked about the tape recorder and each day she refused.

One evening, as I sat listening to a tutoring session when I had spoken about the recorder, I made the following note. There has to be a way to get Edith to use the digital recorder. What is responsible for her repeated refusal (Sandra journal entry into response to a tutoring session, January 2010)? Over the next week, I listened to our research conversations and I failed to hear anything which might shed light on her refusal. I knew she was capable and willing to operate a tape recorder, her own. I thought about this. A small rectangular device with six operational buttons: stop, play, record, rewind, fast forward, and pause. I knew she had mastered this because she offered to read onto her own tape recorder. This intrigued me: why could Edith use her own recorder and why would she not consider a similar, albeit, digital recording device?

One day I sat down with the recorder and wondered how few instructions I could give while still allowing Edith to record and playback her voice. At the same time that I wanted Edith to record herself reading, Bella wondered if there was some way I could record the sounds produced by each of the phonemes in her card deck. When I asked why, she said that when she got home and took out the deck to practice she found she sometimes could not recall the sounds.

Wanting to attend to both issues, I set out to create straightforward instructions which would result in both women easily using the digital recorders.

With instructions in hand, I introduced the recorders on a day when both women were present. In reflection, this was a good strategy as Bella's easy confidence at touching and attempting to follow the instructions spilled over to Edith, who I suspect did not want to be left out of the learning. I proceeded very slowly, letting the women take the lead. I had two recorders so each woman proceeded at her own pace and they looked back and forth from their own recorder to the other. We spent approximately 30 minutes working with the recorders until both women were confident. We put the recorders off to the side and began tutoring. Just before class ended, I asked the women to get the recorders and I asked them to record and playback their voices; both women were able to do so. I was silent as they sat working on this job. When they asked a question or verbalized what they were doing, I remained silent. This was purposeful because I imagined them at home, attempting to work with the recorder and I knew I would not be there to offer assistance; therefore they had to be able to operate it independently. The women took the recorders home. On the next tutoring day, both women had recorded their voices and played them back. Bella was now eager to record a file of me reading the phonemes aloud and Edith wanted me to take the recorder to my office and transfer her reading onto my laptop. No comments were made about the recorder. From that day forward, she made regular use of the recorder as she worked to improve her reading fluency. I was glad because I planned to ask the women to take pictures to show me what it means to live with limited literacies.

By the time I invited Edith to take photographs, we had been working together for nearly 5 months. I was feeling more confident about our relationship. We worked through a significant portion of the journal and digital recorder tension. I felt we trusted one another to work through

any tension which might arise as a result of the digital camera. I was eager to participate in a research conversation where Edith would share the photographs and talk about what they meant to her as a woman with literacies less than she desired.

I asked Edith if she would take a digital camera and take pictures of whatever she liked and then talk to me about the pictures and how they were meaningful. I asked her if she would show me, with the photographs, what it meant to live with literacies less than what she desired. I had purchased a small digital camera with a large touch screen interface. I had done a significant amount of research before purchasing the camera because I wanted it to be as straightforward as possible.

Mindful of Edith's neo-luddite tendencies, I introduced the camera on one of the days Bella was absent. I did not want Edith to experience tension which might result from the presence of another. From her body language, I understood Edith was reluctant; however, she did not refuse. When I first put the camera on the table, she pushed her chair back from the table. I invited her to pick it up, which she did. Edith never shared stories which might have given me an understanding of why she was technology reluctant, other than saying she was not good with it and she would not use it. As she had learned to manage the digital recorder, I was hopeful. I had a plan with two points of consideration. One, purchase an uncomplicated camera with a large, straightforward, touch screen interface and two, when presenting the camera, let Edith handle it. We began with practicing turning it on and off. Then we moved to picture taking. We proceeded very slowly and we repeated steps over and over again. Because of our relationship history, I knew one of Edith's preferred learning strategies was frequent repetition. So we proceeded slowly with Edith setting the pace. She took pictures of me, we viewed and deleted them,

laughed, we turned it on and off many, many times until finally Edith said, “This camera is easy. Where did you get it?” (tutoring session, April, 2010).

I experienced this question as an opening and asked her again about picture taking and she agreed and in so doing another relational path, another conversation was opened. When Edith returned the camera and spoke to me about why she had taken each of the photographs, I understood many of the stories she had previously shared with me in new ways. The stories were more complex and often her positioning within the stories shifted. Or perhaps I shifted in terms of how I was positioning her.

While I was delighted to have the photographs and engage in research conversations where she spoke about how each picture was meaningful, I continued to be at a loss because Edith never shared stories which allowed me to deepen my understanding of the tension she felt around technology. I was eager to understand her tension. I read Bateson (2004) who reminded me to consider multiple points of view, including conflicting ideas. I remembered Edith telling me stories of school where teachers had demanded she do something they knew she could not: read aloud in front of her classmates and write words on paper without any errors. As a result of these experiences Edith said, she learned to do anything to avoid these moments. She spoke about putting her head on the desk, suddenly not feeling well, going to the bathroom, purposefully forgetting books at home, or at least telling the teacher the book was at home; anything to avoid standing up and having them laugh into her back. When she told me these stories, I wondered about a teacher who knew a child could not read and still said teacher insist Edith stand up to do so. I also considered my own stories of school. In my high school gym class, students from the occupational stream were integrated with us. We were merciless in our verbal bullying of these students and the teacher laughed along with us. Remembering these stories and

holding them alongside Edith's stalwart refusal of technology, I understood her refusal as a coherent story (Crities, 1971) told to stop any possibility of her having her back laughed into, or her experience turned into sorrow-filled stories. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) described this as narrative unity. Edith's refusal was a "meaning giving account, an interpretation Narrative unities emerge from our past, bring about certain practices in the present, and guide us toward certain practices in our future" (pp. 74-75). I understand Edith's refusal as her way of avoiding sorrow stories.

Edith agreed to take the camera. By late April 2010, she had had the camera for a couple of weeks. I asked if she would come and talk with me about the pictures she had taken. I began by asking her about the camera and she repeated how easy it was to operate and how much she and her daughter had enjoyed having it. No other comments or stories were shared about her use of the camera. Increasingly I understood Edith's need to feel in command of the technology in her efforts to prevent a repeat visit to sorrow-filled stories.⁷¹ On the day Edith spoke to me about the pictures she had taken, she shared the following story, which deepened my understanding of the tensions she experienced around technology.

In a way I do work there. I keep the adult literacy centre organized. I am the right hand assistant to one of the coordinators. People know I can get the work done, so they come and ask me to do jobs and I do them. Even though I do all of this, I am not confident to take a paying job. Like when I answer the phones. I can do that, but I hate to write down

⁷¹ Edith noted she did not want to be reminded of bad things which had happened when she was a child at school or as an adult attempting to make her way. For example, she told a story of wanting to get a driving permit and her boss told her she could not get one because she could not read. Her response was to go and get one. Another story she shared happened when she visited an employment office and met with an advisor. She told him of her reading problems and he commented she should go back to where she came from. Later that day, Edith was hired as a janitor. (research conversation, June 20, 2011)

messages; I hate it. I can't run a computer. Still they are confident in me. They say, "Ask Edith, she knows how." (research conversation, May, 2010)

Clandinin and Connelly (1988) wrote about multiple story lines which influence a life. Thinking about this I wondered how Edith was narratively connecting her early school stories and the stories we were co-composing. I wondered about how these stories were influencing and positioning her identities. From her early school stories, Edith had learned to story teachers, students considered brighter than her, community workers, technology, and school landscapes as potential threats.

As Edith and I lived alongside one another and composed shared stories, she could not abandon the temporality of her stories to live by. In inviting Edith to participate in the study, I had invited her to enter into the midst of so many stories (past, present, and future) and so many lives. Therefore I began to think about her refusal to use technology within the complexity of the temporality (past, present, and future) of her stories to live by and I understood it as a coherent story. Her told stories and our shared stories taught me that I could tutor through tension as long as I continually knew our developing relationship as the most important element of the process.⁷² Whether or not Edith learned to use a camera, a digital recorder, or a computer was not the most important issue. What was most important was the ongoing development of our relationship because as it developed we learned to trust, respect and care for one another. In so doing, we understood there would be tension-filled moments, our stories would continue to bump up (Clandinin et al., 2006) ; however, we would find ways to navigate the tension because we valued our relationship and wanted it to continue.

⁷² During a research conversation (June 29, 2011) Edith commented had I not pushed her through the tutoring, she would have felt I had given up on her. Hearing Edith say this moves me deeply as I recall the regular tension I experienced as I wondered if I was pushing too hard and if this would result in her leaving the study.

Deepening Understandings of What it Means to Compose a Life With Literacies Less Than One Desires: Edith Talks About the Pictures She Took

The Signs in the Mall



It makes me happy when I am out and I can read signs; before I had to ask. I am in the opposite shoes now, I can read the signs to my daughter and I do. I am Martina's⁷³ teacher. When we are out, I show her things, I point them out to her, I teach her so she can be independent. She can do lots of things, if you

give her a chance and support her at the beginning. I know what it is like to feel sheltered because of limited literacies; the way you feel about yourself is not good. I do not want these feelings for Martina. So when we are out I read to her, I show her things, I teach her. (research conversation, May, 2010)

⁷³ Martina is a pseudonym used to protect the identity of Edith's daughter.

The Little House



I was a little thing, like the house. Now I am blossoming like the trees around the house. My knowledge is getting so big and not being able to read is getting smaller and smaller and I am opening up. And some people look at this picture and don't see the number thirty. It's like they don't see me because I can't read and write. But I am opening up. Coming here to the university for my classes and having you as my university teacher, I feel I am making growth. I feel myself growing and at the same time I know there are things which I am not

confident about, things that keep me from imagining I could get a full time paying job. I know I am growing and I know I am sharing my growing with Martina and this makes me very happy and proud. From the day I found out I was pregnant I wanted to be a good mother. I wanted to be all the things for my child, which my mother never was. (research conversation, May 2010)

The Shoe Picture



When I learned I was pregnant it surprised me. I never imagined I would have children; I didn't think I was knowledgeable enough. When my child came along, I knew I had to always be one step ahead of her. I realized I had very big shoes to fill, like the shoes in the picture. I wanted to be a good parent to my child and I knew this included being able to read. I remember when Martina was in

early elementary, she went to school and told her teacher not to send anything home because her Mom could not read. It was hard for me to listen as the teacher told me this story⁷⁴. When Martina was a little older, she attended a school where there were segregated classes depending on the children's perceived academic abilities; I took her out of that school. All the way through, I had to fight for my daughter and I continue to fight for her. For example, I knew she needed help from a speech pathologist and I had to fight to get the services. I became a regular volunteer at school. A little later, the school wanted to label my child, but I refused to accept the label. I knew my child and I knew

⁷⁴ Edith recalls experiencing hurt when she learned Martina had told the teacher of her struggles with reading. Edith felt it was her responsibility to tell the teacher. She understood her child did not tell out of spite, nevertheless Edith was hurt. (research conversation, July 2011)

what she could do so I knew the label did not fit. I challenged them and in the end they changed it.

I tried to work within the system. Teachers knew they could depend on me to help out. When I was volunteering I saw many things; a lot of it reminded me of how I had been treated when I was a child. When Martina went to school, my mother shoes felt bigger. I was constantly trying to fill large mother shoes and struggling with my literacies made it difficult. So when I look at these shoes carefully, I see they are built out of bricks. These bricks could be a wall, one of the walls I hit up against when I tried to get help for my daughter. Or the brick wall and the fence in the background could be all the times I met people who told me a woman with a learning disability could not be a good mother.

Raising my child, I often had to ask for help when I needed to explain things to her. When she entered puberty, I took her to a nurse who helped me explain the changes. I often asked for help because the shoes were so big. Mothers with a learning disability can raise a child, can help them with school. No need to label the child because of the parent⁷⁵. (research conversation, May, 2010)

⁷⁵ I am thinking about Edith's comments as I read Lindemann Nelson's (2001) ideas about the connections between identity and oppression. She wrote, "... the "who" and "how" stories of mothering all identify specific groups of people in ways that mark them as morally undesirable or in need of policing" (p. 150). I am wondering if this is what Edith was referring to when she said, "Mothers with a learning disability can raise a child, can help them with school. No need to label the child because of the parent" (research conversation, May, 2010).

The Wall Mural



When I look carefully at this picture I see all kinds of people, different people with different abilities. Looking at them you can't tell if they can read, write and understand. I know some people are ashamed to say they have troubles with literacies. I think it is a bigger shame to keep it to yourself because you are always standing on the wrong side of the learning fence. I don't think people

should ever be ashamed of not learning to read, it is not their fault. You know people who can't read have to get low paying jobs, they can't work in offices. I want to use the muscles in my brain because my body is no longer strong. I want to make something of myself, make people proud of me. I don't sit home, I go out to the adult literacy centre and offer to help people because they helped me so much. Helping at the centre is a big accomplishment for me. I won this computer and printer as part of the literacy award. You know I don't like computers but I am so glad I have it for my daughter and my husband also uses it. (research conversation, May, 2010)

Edith's Dog



I took a picture of my dog because she never judges me or tells me I can't do something. My dogs constantly support me by not leaving me and they never make fun of me. So many times I had to deal with rude people who were verbally abusive because I struggle with

reading and writing. My dogs never, ever do that. They accept me no matter how I read and write. They often bring me comfort after I experience a difficult day because of my issues with literacies. Struggling with reading and writing is an invisible disability. Even though people cannot see my learning disability, I often feel isolated. There were times when I took Martina on cross-country bus or train rides and I talked with people. Sometimes I would tell them of my struggles with literacies and they always wondered how I coped. I think my grandparents taught me I could accomplish things; they encouraged me and my sister. This has been very helpful.

I also think the isolation I feel is one of the reasons I have been involved for such a long period of time with adult literacy centers. When I go there I know I am surrounded by people who struggle like I do. I feel safe when I am there; I don't have to wonder or worry about someone hurting me or reminding me of earlier times because of my literacies. I am comfortable there. It is also a place where I can help others who are beginning to learn to read. My dogs always offer me comfort, never judge me and don't

care about my literacies. They make a hard life a little easier. (research conversation, May 2010)

Hummingbird Picture



You know when you look in the mirror and see your reflection, I know my face has not changed, but I changed. When I look in the mirror I look a lot smarter. I feel like this hummingbird. The faster I beat my wings, regardless of how long it takes, I am learning. This fascinates me because I know there are so many things I can do if I just choose to beat

my wings and beat them hard and beat them fast. Even if I can't read everything I can still get a lot of meaning from a few words. Wherever I go I try to read everything and make meaning. (research conversation, May 2010)

As Edith and I sit at the computer and negotiate her narrative account I am experiencing gratitude, hope and an impending sense of loss. I am grateful for our friendship, I am hopeful that I will complete my dissertation and the impending sense of loss is linked to the fact that in the not too distant future, I will leave from the city and in so doing put a significant amount of physical distance between myself and Edith, a dear friend. Not wanting to linger on the loss I turn my attention to Bella and her narrative account, which follows.

Chapter Five: Carefully Selecting the Format(s) to Re-Present

Ely (2007) reminds me to be deeply thoughtful of the “forms [I] use in [my] efforts to re-present, evoke, and discuss what we have lived and learned in doing narrative research” (p. 568). Moreover, she argues that I am “obliged to present the stories . . . in ways that cleave as closely as possible to the essence of what and how they shared [and in so doing] . . . clarify both the process of research and the findings” (p. 569). To these ends I have carefully created an illustrative key to assist the reader when there are temporal shifts or shifts in field text type. The icon represents the type of field text and the leftward leaning font, indicates a temporal shift.

Reader's Key



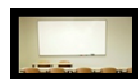
Sandra's journal



Sandra's planning book



Research conversation transcript



Transcript from the tutoring classroom



Writing from (event date) vantage point

Writing Edith and Bella's narrative accounts I understand “there is no telling it like it is, for in the telling, there is making. The task is to do justice to the situation, and yet to recognize that all stories . . . are fabrications—things made” (Eisner, 1991, p. 191). And I also understand that “the story I tell of the other is as much-maybe more-a story of me” (Neumann, 1992, p. 24).

Mindful of Eisner's (1991) claim and of Kramp's (2004) argument that stories "make life experiences meaningful" (p. 107), we⁷⁶ composed Bella's narrative account appreciating her life is neither tidy nor linear. Rather, her stories are interwoven, shaped and re-shaped over and over, forward and backward by temporality, sociality, place, and her capacity and willingness to recall, tell, and retell on any given day. This narrative account therefore moves forward and backward in time and within, between and across field texts as Bella told me stories of her life as it was, and as we co-composed stories through 6 months of tutoring and our follow-up research conversations. The initial told stories serve to create a starting point for understanding how Bella's identities were and are being shaped and re-shaped as she lives in a western Canadian, urban centre with literacies less than she desires. These told stories, our ongoing research conversations, the field texts, and our co-composed lived stories through the tutoring serve as the basis for deepening understandings of identities and shifting identities embedded within literacy tutoring. This narrative account is a study of Bella's life as she told it to me and of our co-composed experiences as our lives unfolded. I understand these two starting points as complementary (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This account then is purposeful in that it consists of stories and the "interpretation and meanings" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479) we⁷⁷ composed of them. Moreover, before beginning the process of negotiating this account, I made a list of the scholarly references I cited in my efforts to better understand Bella's experiences and our co-composed experiences. As we read, taking turns, page by page, I stopped each time there was a scholarly reference. I summarized the scholar's argument and how it helped me understand

⁷⁶ With this particular word usage, I have purposefully selected the pronoun 'we' because I understand many voices are embedded within this text. Some of the voices include Bella's, mine, Jean's, temporal voices, voices from the literature and voices belonging to colleagues from the CRTED.

⁷⁷ This use of the pronoun 'we' also refers to many voices which are embedded within this text.

a particular story and then invited Bella to comment. In addition, as we negotiated the account Bella responded. I have therefore included footnotes which encapsulate her response. I believe the footnotes speak to the depth of Bella's engagement with and understanding of the process of negotiating her narrative account.

Methodologically, I made the decision to write the narrative account in a letter format. I have done this for two reasons. First, it is my effort to acknowledge and foreground the relational (between persons, places, things and/or time) while allowing for a co-composed dialogue. Nodding's (1992) perspective on the care one can bring to dialogue also informs this methodological decision. She wrote, "in the caring orientation we are more concerned with connecting, feeling with, responding positively to expressed needs, and understanding ourselves well enough to be able to summon the attribute of care when it is needed" (p. 13). Second, it affords a re-presentation which I hope is "non-hierarchical and nonlinear but more a circle of understanding" (Mickelson, 1995, p. 26).



Writing from a February 25, 2011 vantage point

My Dearest Bella,

Our first attempt at meeting was on November 12, 2009. I walked over to our prearranged meeting location and began looking for a woman with a golden purse, just as you had instructed me to do. I waited for 45 minutes and I never saw a single golden purse. I worried that I was in the wrong location or that something had happened to you. I returned to my office and called you and I was happy and relieved when you picked up on the first ring. From our conversation, I realized that we were in two separate locations. We made a second plan to meet. Later that evening, I wrote the following entry.



Sandra's journal:

November 12, 2009

It felt peculiar, somewhat foreign, to be waiting to meet a participant outside the emergency entrance of the hospital. I kept feeling I was waiting for an accident, sickness or some sort of crisis as I watched a steady stream of ambulances unload their passengers. I wondered if this was an appropriate place to arrange to meet.



Writing from February 25, 2011 vantage point

We met on two occasions to begin our research conversations and to get a sense of your reading, writing, spelling, and comprehension levels. We did this on November 16 and 17, 2009. Following these first two conversations, time passed and we shared many experiences. On February 3, 2011, 7 months after we finished our tutoring, you came to my office and again we spoke. Each time we met we co-composed experiences and shared stories. I have spent and continue to spend considerable time listening to our research conversations and tutoring sessions, reading field texts, and jotting notes in the margins of the transcriptions and slowly and carefully looking at and thinking about the artefacts you shared and those we created during the tutoring. I have done this because Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me “the writing of field texts shapes the experience [and] . . . are mostly what remains of field experience” (p. 143).

As I listen, I am perturbed because in many of the told stories I hear the voices of children brutally victimized as they endured unmitigated and unnecessary suffering. I understand these endured hard stories shape and re-shape identities; I wonder, therefore how these children fared. Moreover, knowing the brutalization was committed by adults charged with the responsibility of caring for the children, I experience sharp anger. These told stories are also

difficult to experience because they call forward some of my early stories, or perhaps they temporally shift me backwards into the midst of endured stories, and threads of my identities which were and are influenced by narratives of childhood dysfunction. I put the headset to my ears tentatively because my body remembers. Your told stories seem to be trellises upon which my memories creep forward. They come to me as I sit quietly, they come to me violently in my dreams and they come to me as I walk from my office to my wee flat. I try shaking my head in an effort to extricate the images which are pounding my senses in full colour. I shake my entire body viciously and they continue to creep forward. I want to be home; I want to put myself in a book. I want my childhood practice of being able to escape into a book to comfort me NOW. I know I am leaking and there seems to be little I can do. Later, much later, I wonder if there is a way to forbid the temporal shifting because each time it deposits me unceremoniously into endured, violent, primordial dysfunction. However, as a narrative inquirer, I cannot offer an accounting independent of time, therefore, I listen and hope that Connelly and Clandinin (2006) had it right when they wrote “the researcher may share similar experiences to those under study with participants, empathy and close relationships may develop” (p. 482). I am hopeful for a sea of empathy and close relationships to develop.

Reflecting Upon our Initial Research Conversations (November 16 and 17, 2010)



Writing from a February 26, 2011 vantage point

At the time of our initial research conversations, I was instructing an undergraduate course. Reading the transcripts and listening to the digital recordings from these 2 days I hear myself sharing stories from my teaching and I hear you asking questions about pencil grip, letter formation and near and far point copying. You commented as follows:



Research conversation transcript: November 16, 2009

"Well Sandra, do teachers even think about these things? I don't think they do. Some of the things you are telling me would be good to tell kids, but I don't think they do."



Sandra's Journal: November 17, 2009

Bella asked insightful questions and offered her own ideas. Her questions seemed to loop back to what she believes teachers should be doing in classrooms versus what she knows them to be doing. I wonder about the temporality and sociality of this comment.

When I asked you to share any memories of learning to read, you said,



Research conversation transcript: November 17, 2009

I have bad memories from Grade 2. We had this teacher and she was really strict. If you made a mistake, she had a ruler and she would smack your fingers. When you were writing something, she would stand over you and stare. If she saw you had written one word wrong, she would take the ruler and hit your hand. There was this one student; he was like a trouble maker, but not really a trouble maker. He had that spirit about him. One day the teacher hit a girl really hard and he came up to her, grabbed the ruler and smacked her. Then the principal came and the girl and the boy left the classroom and they

never returned to our class or the school. That boy he always stuck up for people; he wouldn't tolerate things that were wrong.



Writing from a February 27, 2011 vantage point: Inquiring into Bella's Story

Over the months as we co-composed stories during the tutoring sessions and during our research conversations, I returned to the above story, told on our second day of meeting. Mindful of the three dimensional narrative inquiry space, I began to visualize an identity thread which seemed able to shift temporally and regardless of context as long as a perceived issue of injustice was present. From this first told story and many others you shared through our ongoing research conversations, I understand doing the *right thing* matters to you. When the Grade 2 teacher struck the girl and the *not really a troublemaker* boy struck her back, I understood you knew the boy as having done the right thing in the face of injustice. I also understood this as an early story which may have contributed to a plotline of knowing school as a place where teachers could not be trusted to do the right thing, and as places where teachers could, at will, hit a student. Simultaneously holding the three commonplaces of temporality, sociality, and place, I imagine you as a young child attending school, a place where the teacher could and would strike you if you put a single word down on the page which she deemed incorrect. I wondered how this story influenced the relational space between you and your teacher and between you and future teachers, of which I am one. I also wondered how this story influenced your developing literacies.⁷⁸ How did you come to understand the purposes for writing, with your teacher standing close by, ready to strike you, the writer? Moreover, how did the teacher's presence

⁷⁸ On June 30, 2011 during a research conversation, Bella noted that to this day when writing or when with a tutor she remembers the teacher with the ruler and she worries she might mess up. Also she continues to be frightened by this childhood experience. Moreover, Bella said she was so afraid in class that she learned to live in silence because in those days a child dare not say anything bad about a teacher.

influence what you were willing or able to put down on your page? Finally, I wondered how it influenced your identities as a developing reader and writer to have spent a school year in this teacher's class. From this story I imagine a contribution to a plotline where teachers are unworthy of your trust or teachers are people to be feared, particularly when they are in close proximity. Moreover, I understand this story may have influenced your understanding of writing such that the words you were willing to inscribe on the page were words you were confident were correctly spelled. Furthermore, I understand this as a story of fear containing two layers. First, I understand it as a fear of writing and second, a fear of punishment from a ruler-ready teacher.

As we tutored, we shared experiences, some of which seemed to be influenced by plotlines of distrust and fear. At the outset, I was not awake to this. The following section knits together a narrative from carefully selected field texts: lesson plans, my journal, tutoring and research conversations. It tells stories of your world travelling. From Lugones, (1989) I understand world travelling as an openness to the way other people see us. Moreover, I understand it as a willingness to look at things from others' perspectives while attempting to see oneself from another's eyes and in so doing realize there are multiple ways to be in the world. Lugones called this way of being loving play; she knows it as a place where people experience between worlds; a place where there are no fixed rules. This section also contains stories which I came to understand as affordance stories because they offered opportunities to awake (Woolfe, 1925) from my arrogant self-perception (Frye, 1983) with loving perception (Lugones, 1989). Woolfe (1925) in her work, *The Modern Essay, which was included in The Common Reader*, wrote, "sting us wide awake and fix us in a trance which is not sleep but rather an intensification of life" (p.1). This is what your stories did for me Bella, they woke me up to other stories, your

stories. I had been as Frye (1983) noted asleep in my arrogant self perception, such that I could not, would not hear and experience others' stories because I had been unwilling to look beyond my own interests. As our friendship grew and as we co-composed stories to live by (Connelly and Clandinin, 1999) I was able to think about who I wanted to be in the relational space between us and increasingly and mindfully I brought loving perception (Lugones, 1989) to our developing friendship because I wanted to travel to your worlds in my efforts to understand what it is to be you and what it is to be me, in your eyes.



Sandra's planning book: December 1, 2009

"Remember, encourage Bella to use her hand when she is attempting to read unfamiliar, polysyllabic words and when she is at the board writing."



Tutoring Transcript: December 2, 2009

Sandra: Bella, use your hand. Use your hand to divide the word into syllables. Bella, give it a try, one finger per sound. Okay, good. Now blend the two first sounds. Blend the sounds; make the first sound bump into the second. Good, that's correct, well done Bella. Say the word, say it in syllables and show it to me on your hand, one sound per finger.

Bella: extended

Sandra: Okay Bella, now read it, one syllable at a time and use your hand.

Bella: ex-ten-did

Sandra: Bella, how about your hand?



Sandra's journal: December 2, 2009

Again today, I tried to get Bella to use her hand to help with decoding polysyllabic words. She mostly refused. This is frustrating because when she does use her hand, her spelling and reading are better; she is correct to the syllable. I keep thinking if we can get her to spell correctly to the syllable, the spell checker on the computer will be most useful. But this is pointless if she won't work at it consistently.



Research conversation transcripts: February 8, 2010 & February 3,

2011

February 8, 2010

Bella: I still don't feel comfortable using my hands, or going like that. That part really bugs me, you know?

Sandra: If it really bothers you, don't do it.

Bella: But on the other hand, it helps! Well to me, I feel like I'm a retarded person, like you know? I just – I'm the kind of person that doesn't like, want to look bad, I'm not saying that I want to look smart, but I don't want to look stupid either. Using my hands I feel like it, I feel like it feels stupid or retarded, just it makes me feel so uncomfortable, and it's like, and it's like sticking me in a room with a bunch of ten men that are just like gross, and I just feel so uncomfortable so I just want to get out of there, right?

February 3, 2010

Bella: You know Sandra when I first went there, to tutoring, I have to admit, I was angry, I was pissed. I felt you were treating me like a retarded person with all the

stuff you made me do with my hands. I felt like a retarded. The more you pushed, the madder I was. I tried to leave but I thought about you pushing so hard. I thought if she can push that hard and she is that smart, she must really believe I can do it. If she can believe in me and she can see something in me, then I have to believe that I can do it if I am just pushed hard enough because I knew you cared about me. The more you pushed the more I believed in me and the more I knew I could do it.⁷⁹



Writing from a February 28, 2011 vantage point

Looking Back: Bella Re-stories our Shared Experiences

Over time I understood that your distrust towards teachers was influenced by your experiences upon school landscapes as a student and later as parent and grandparent. When I repeatedly asked you to use your hands you understood this as a continuation of a distrust plotline⁸⁰, a plotline you were prepared and ready to push against when you perceived it as unjust for me to insist on a behaviour which left you feeling deeply uncomfortable.

As I tutored you, there were many moments when I made my personal practical knowledge visible by asking and insisting that you use your hand to decode and spell. These

⁷⁹ Bella commented that whenever I asked her to use her hands to help with spelling or decoding she felt she knew, for the very first time, that she had a learning problem and this made her feel very low and acutely uncomfortable. She also spoke about how she knew using her hands had no logical relationship to how smart she is, however, she repeatedly made this connection. Thinking about this made her wonder why she got so upset. She concluded that by using her hands she was showing Edith and me that she was not smart because all her limitations were clearly visible and she could not hide; she was standing there naked. Bella also noted that in the midst of these experiences she also felt capable because I pushed hard and she felt I believed in her abilities to improve. She experienced the pushing as an enormous vote of confidence in her abilities. (research conversation, June 30, 2011).

⁸⁰ Clandinin et al. (2006) wrote about how an embodied person interacts with the social which they described as "... the social, cultural, [and] institutional narratives" (p. 1). Lindeman (2001) described master narratives as "the stories found lying about in our culture that serve as summaries of socially shared understandings" (p.6). Moreover, she said, master narratives are "stock plots and readily recognizable character types" that are used "to makes sense of our experience [and] . . .to justify what we do" (p.6). Plotlines then shape and shift lives. I understand plotlines through these two lenses simultaneously.

were moments when my stories of multi-sensory literacy tutor intersected with your stories of school and teachers; tension ensued. Your early experiences of school made it a place where teachers could behave in unjust ways and students had to endure it. My insistence that you use your hand shifted you temporally and contextually to a time and place where teachers were unworthy of your trust. In that moment, I was your teacher, therefore untrustworthy. In reaction you did the *right thing*, you pushed back against the perceived injustice and refused to use your hand for more than an instant of compliance. I understand therefore, in this moment of tension, our stories were being shaped by temporality, context, and embodied plotlines. As we reacted to the tension, you as defender of justice and me as knowing tutor, the relational space was flooded by reactionary, right or wrong ways of knowing. I was determined to have you use your hand. Therefore, I put my experience in the foreground. I stopped being awake to the importance of the relational and I

could not identify with . . . [you], I could not see myself in . . . [you], I could not welcome . . . [your] world. I saw myself as separate from . . . [you], a different sort of being, not quite of the same species. This separation, this lack of love, I saw, and I think that I saw correctly as a lack in myself (not a fault, but a lack). I also see that if this was a lack of love, love cannot be what I was taught. Love has to be rethought, made anew.

(Lugones, 1987, pp. 6–7)

Because I continued to insist you use your hand, we regularly came into this tension and therefore leaving the tutoring and the study became an option for you. And yet this did not happen.

One of your ‘narrative threads’⁸¹ (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) is a distrust of school and teachers. However, over time you were able to see and know me, as someone other than one to be resisted and one unworthy of your trust. As you thought about how hard I was pushing and how you understood this pushing, you retold the story such that you knew yourself as capable and you knew me as deserving of your trust. Bella, I understand that your retold story affirms my knowing of you as a talented, capable woman who has honoured me by trusting me. I also understand it as an affordance, an opportunity to think hard about what Frye (1983) referred to as arrogant self perceptions. In my failure to identify with you, in you coming to trust me, and in turn in my consideration of loving you I understand I am deeply affected by the time we spent together because I am learning to think deeply about who I am in the relational space. Moreover, I am learning to think about my inclination towards judgement.

As part of our research conversation on February 9, 2010 I asked again about stories of learning to read.



Research conversation transcript: February 9, 2010

Well Sandra I was sick, I was mostly sick all the time. So I missed school because of it, I had problems with my kidneys. I lived in a small town and they had to take me to the city for the operation. I remember I missed a lot of school. And when I went back to school they didn't do anything to help me catch up. They were the type of school that just passed you on to the next grade. They should have helped but they didn't. Then we left the small town and

⁸¹ Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described narrative threads as ways of knowing which runs through stories.

moved to the city where I was really shy and quiet and everything was so different. My identical twin, she did all the talking, I was the quiet one. They didn't do a lot of helping at that school either. The other thing Sandra, my mother kept me home a lot. My mom made me get the other kids up and out so I missed a lot of days of school. She didn't want me to go to school. She wanted me to take care of everybody. When we moved to the big city it got even worse, she couldn't cope. One time I met a counsellor and I told her about begging my mom to let me go to school. She was great with me. First she talked with the teachers and explained and then they stopped bugging me. Then she went and spoke with my parents and it was better. My parents thought I was strange because I liked school and I really wanted to go. My older brothers had all left school. I would go home every day with a tall pile of books. They laughed at me and said I must be adopted because I was the only one who liked school, wanted to go and do my homework.



Writing from a March 1, 2011 vantage point

As time passed and as we continued to share stories, I came to understand how frequent school absences alongside a keen desire to go to school, which was an unfamiliar story for your parents and siblings, influenced your stories. Your desire to go to school, being ill and your mom wanting you home to care for your siblings each influenced the stories you learned to live and tell as you navigated school and in your efforts to develop literacies. As I listened to you tell stories of wanting to go to school, of being sick and your mom insisting you stay home and care for your family, I hear how upset it made you to be kept away from school. Moreover, I understand how school absences influence what a child learns, teachers' expectations of a child's

learning capacities and sometimes their willingness to teach a child. Lamdin (1996) linked irregular school attendance with diminished academic performance. I wonder how different your stories of school would be if you had gone to school every day. Moreover, your description of both schools, the one in the small town and the one you attended in the urban centre as schools which “didn’t do a lot of helping” allowed me to appreciate the disparity between what you wanted from school and what you experienced. I am also remembering one day, after our tutoring was over, as we walked to the elevator you said, “I was always worried about not passing because I knew in my heart there was something wrong. I was determined but I knew I wasn’t getting it and I knew they wouldn’t really help me” (February 8, 2010). From this I understand you knew school as a place where not all children *got it* and where not all children received the help they needed, and in your case, wanted dearly.

I am also thinking about a plotline of fear of writing which was regularly influenced by high rates of absenteeism. I am thinking about this within the context of a child’s efforts to improve her literacies. I am also thinking about my efforts to get you to keep a writing journal. As we both know, journal writing was not something you took to or something you warmed up to over time. When I asked you about the journal, you replied as follows.



Research Conversation transcript: February 8, 2010

The thing with me is that I could write a lot of things in a journal. The only thing is that I would have a problem sharing it with someone. Maybe if I write, you know, Dear Sandra, like I am writing you a letter that would be different. I just feel like, you know, someone would be invading my journal, you know what I

mean? You know when you have a journal and there is certain stuff. Sandra as soon as I find my journal, cause I still haven't found it, and then I will try it.



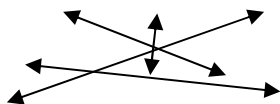
Writing from a March 14, 2011 vantage point

Looking at the artefacts from our study, I count three journal entries written by you. Journal writing was a task I asked you and Edith to do at home. I am also thinking about the writing you did in class, when Edith and I were present. There was never a time when you refused to write. On the contrary, from your questions and efforts I understood a desire to do your best work. So how do I understand your reluctance with journal writing, alongside outstanding classroom writing efforts and alongside the knowing you drew forward from your early school stories of writing? I am thinking deeply about the conversations when you spoke about being best able to read, write, and understand when you are calm. In particular, you described teachers who never raised their voices, answered all your questions, and were very kind. I continue to wonder about this perceived discrepancy as I listen to the endured hard stories you shared.

Bella, you told many stories of the abuse you and your children endured. These stories began early in your life and continue today. In the section which follows, I carefully selected words and sentences from our research conversations, the literature, children's books, and I have added some of my thoughts in my effort to write about what we came to call your endured hard stories. I have done this to share insights about you and to share parts of myself to "level the field of power relations between researcher and audience" (Ely, 2007, p. 578). Moreover, it is my effort to invite the reader, if only for a moment, to consider and experience some of the complexities of your stories to live by and to wonder how they shaped and continue to shape

your literacies. Bella I loathe these stories. Each time I read them or listen to them I experience white, hot anger. It is difficult to live in a world where children must endure hard stories.

Hard Endured Stories: Bella's Landscapes



My Dearest Bella,

We have known each other for a year and half. For 6 months of this time frame, December 2009 until June 2010, we met three times per week for 90 minutes for tutoring sessions. We also met, and we continue to meet, for research conversations. As we spoke, you shared what we came to refer to as *endured hard stories*; stories which you said make you feel like a blind person because they always catch you unaware and cause you to trip. When I laid the transcripts from our conversations down on a table and read them, I understood generational temporality and generational reverberations (Young, 2003) which are embedded in your hard stories. In the section which follows, I have selected four stories from the many endured hard

stories you shared with me. I have selected these four because I understand they encapsulate and advance generationally the hard stories. Subsequently, I inquired into each story. I have continued with the letter format because I want you to know how much your telling has afforded me.

Fluid

Hard Endured Story # 1.

I was in foster care. I had to be 5 or 6 years old. The younger ones they put us in. The older ones got to stay with my dad. My mom was in the hospital and my twin was also in there, she had tuberculosis. My dad had to work and he couldn't take care of us. So I went to a foster family and he came and picked me up on the weekends. There were three of us in foster homes, but we were not together. My dad came to get me and he seen me on the step all beaten up. My eyes were puffed shut, I couldn't see for sure if it

was him. I was all bruised and I was burnt. He came through the gate and picked me up and rushed me to the hospital and then he went to child welfare. He was mad, yelling and screaming. I remember being in the hospital and I could hear them talking. When my mom came from her floor to visit, I could hear nurses telling her, I had not woken up. I heard her talking to the doctor. He told her they were going to send me to a different hospital because I was not coming out of it and there was nothing more they could do. I had my eyes open and I could hear them but I could not speak or move. I could hear my mom talking to me to, "Bella, ." But I just lay there staring at the ceiling. (research conversation transcript, November 17, 2009)

Inquiring into Hard Endured Story #1

My Dearest Bella,

Today I am reading field texts from the first day you shared this story with me. From the recording of the conversation, I hear my

silence as I shift from confident tutor/researcher to tenuous otherness. Bateson (2000) described otherness as “that which is different, alien mysterious” (p. 5). I wondered then and I continue to wonder now if I am capable of bearing witness to your stories and what does it, this act of bearing witness, require of me? Coles (1989) when writing about the importance of stories knew them in part as a way to “...help understand the palpable pain and suffering of another human being” (p. 8). In my listening I am also mindful of Dewey (1938) when he wrote, “every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the ground of what it moves toward and into (p. 38). I wonder how you will value my listening. Do I possess what Dewey described as “sympathetic understanding of individuals as individuals which gives [me]... an idea of what is actually going on in the minds of those who are learning” (p. 39).

I also wonder how you negotiated your life curriculum in moments when you, a dependent and helpless child, was abused. As you were beaten, how did your life stories meet with the lives of your abusers? And how did you

thread these experiences into new tellings of who you were and who you imagined you might become. Schifffrin (2002) suggested “the massive loss of significant and familiar ‘others’ not only disrupts one’s former sense of normal social relationships and the moral order in which they are supposed to reside; it also threatens one’s sense of self as an integrated and continuous entity” (p. 310). It seems the foster care you experienced forced you to endure curriculum making which was absolutely not in your best interests. I wonder what the continuing influence of this trauma is and specifically I wonder how it influences your identity making.

Recently I read a book, *The Boy on the Beach: Building Community Through Play* (2010), by American early years educator, Vivien Gussin Paley. In chapter one, she describes a scene she observed while at the beach; a 5-year-old played, building structures and engaging with self-generated narratives. In response to his play she wrote, “he seems to announce to himself: I, Ely, represented by the letter E, am someone with ideas; I am someone who

turns ideas into actions, and actions into new ideas. Furthermore, I am intended to have my own ideas. That is why I play as I do, to show myself what my ideas are” (p. 8).

Reading Paley’s (2010) comment and appreciating it as a way of knowing I hope young children will experience, I wonder how you attended to such play, when you were forced to endure abuse. Furthermore Bella, what stories did you write into your embodied knowing and how did this knowing shape your identities?

It is my sincere hope that when you told me this hard story, I did as Baylor & Parnall (1997) suggested in their children’s book, *The Other Way to Listen*:

I never
listened
so hard
hard
in my life
It seemed like
the most
natural
thing
in the world.

On the second day we met (November 17, 2009), you told me a story which drew your early experiences of abuse forward such that they reverberated into the lives of your children. You then referred to it on other occasions. And each time you told this story, I wondered about something I read by Schiffrin (2002) “all life stories are situated in a complex interaction between past and present: although ostensibly about the past, they are firmly located in the public world of the present. Knowledge accrued from numerous ‘pasts’ and continuing ‘presents’ creates complex, nonlinear relationships between what we think of as ‘past’ and what we view as ‘present,’ and these relationships intrude on the linear chronology of ‘events’ that we might assume to actually underlie a life story” (p. 315). I also continue to wonder how best to listen as you shared these hard stories.

In this next section, we co-composed the field text as I have included words you shared. I understand this story became part of a generational plotline of abuse and it shaped and reshaped your identities. I was asking about naming yourself and knowing yourself as a ‘mother bear’, when it came to

standing up for your children and you replied as follows.

multiple

Hard Endured Story #2.

It is because of the guilt, I have so much guilt because I married a man, I fell in love with a man who hurt the kids in the worst possible way and I had to make it up to them. My husband hurt the kids, he molested them. At the time I wanted to get a job; so I worked when my husband was watching them. One day I came home and the kids were bruised. I told him if he was going to leave marks, I would take the kids and leave. So we separated and I took the kids to another province and one of the kids there tried to molest my son, but my sister caught it. I came back home and I was telling my husband and he said, “Do you think I did that?” I said, “What do you mean?” I never thought it would be him. Why would he even say a thing like that? So I phoned sexual assault and told them what

he said and everything else. They told me to keep him away from the kids, away from the house. They said they would send someone to question my son. She came and spoke with my son and he said, “The dragon bit me on the penis.” We went for a walk and I asked him, “Who is the dragon?” and he replied, “Mom, I don’t want you to get hurt and I don’t want you to get mad.”

I assured him I would not and he said, “It was Dad.” Right there my whole world just broke. Then he came to the door, I told my son, “I’m going out and I’m going to lock the door. Don’t open it until I tell you to.” I went outside and told my husband he could not see the kids. He threatened to take the kids and I told him there was an investigation going on. He said he would get a nanny to care for the kids because he was going to get custody. I told him this would happen over my dead body. The worker told me to take the kids to therapy. They used these dolls and they found out he was doing it with my

daughter when she was a baby. So I had to take her to the hospital. The doctor told me there was vaginal tearing. (research conversation, November, 17, 2009)

On this same day, I asked if your ex-husband had been prosecuted and you answered,

“No because the kids were too young, my son was too young. At the time it happened the law said that on the day of the trial, the victim had to be in the room with the person who did it. It also said that if the victim was a child, then another person, an adult had to say that he had been there and he had seen it happen. But what I did, I got my sister to help me and we wrote a letter to all the judges, the people in parliament, the police chiefs, and all the people involved with protecting children. I wrote 278 letters. I had someone write the letter for me. I told them what I wanted to say and they wrote it out for me. Then sexual assault helped me photocopy and to pay for stamps and letters. I got the law changed, so the child could be in the courtroom with a screen. So the child would talk behind a screen so he

didn't have to see the person who did it. I remember the day the judge told me my ex-husband could not be charged. He said he was very sorry. I told him not to tell me, I told him to tell my son. He should tell my son, he can't charge his father for hurting him (research conversation: November 17, 2009)

Inquiring into Hard Endured Story #2 March, 2011

My Dearest Bella,

I am thinking about stories as nested (Clandinin et al, 2006) as I listen to and then write down your story. I am also thinking about the compounding influences of numerous, mis-educative experiences from multiple landscapes and across time and generations. Schiffirin (2002) wrote, “living through catastrophic events . . . changes one's life in multiple and complex ways” (p. 310). How did these generational stories shape your identities and the identities of your children? How did you and then your children learn to live in a world where

abuse was endured? I imagine when one of your children was abused, you drew forward your embodied knowing to do the right thing in the face of injustice. In so doing you created narrative coherence (Carr, 1986); your mother bear identity story was on familiar ground, therefore you were able to make sense of another hard story. When telling these hard stories, you named yourself as mother bear, one who would fight for her children. And when you called the sexual assault centre, I imagine you did so because at other times you had been in relation with them. Therefore you had some knowing of their rhythms and responsibilities. These experiences then fit within your and later your children's hard stories.

And again I find myself wondering who I am and who I might be as you tell these hard stories. I am also thinking deeply about the abuse(s) which one human forces on another. I am also wondering about a community and society which tolerates the abuse

of women and children. In a 2008 report entitled *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect*, it was noted that 235,842 maltreatment investigations occurred in Canada and 36% of those, or 85,440, were substantiated. Of the substantiated cases, 3% or 2,607 involved sexual abuse. Moreover, it was noted the children who suffered maltreatment experienced academic difficulties 23% of the time.

When I read children's author, Charlotte Zolotow's picture book, *When the Wind Stops* (1997), I thought about societal stories which often have an unchallenged privilege of perpetuation.

"Nothing ends."

"Nothing?" the little boy asked.

"Nothing," his mother said. "It begins in another place and or in a different way." (p. 7)

"It really does go on and on," he said.

"Nothing ends."(p. 27).

(Zolotow, 1997, *When the Wind Stops*).

I appreciate Zolotow (1997) was not referring to abuse, however, I understand this quote within the context of the ongoing abuse you and your children endured. Moreover, I understand it within the context of the shaping and influences the abuse had and has on the stories you tell and retell.

I want you to know Bella, I now understand our relationship, including these difficult stories you shared with me, has influenced my identities. You and your stories have taught me that "I am incomplete and unreal without other women. I am profoundly dependent on others without having to be their subordinate [or their superior]" (Lugones, 1987, p. 280).

And children's author Carolyn Sollman (1994) nudges me to consider "it seems okay—but there's a lot wrong here—look closely or you'll miss something just like you almost missed me!" (p. 4) In you telling me these endured hard stories and in

our efforts to retell them we have refused to miss the hardness you endured and continue to endure. And I understand this is significant.

During our February 8, 2010 research conversation, you again shared your worries about the possibility this endured story of abuse would encapsulate another generation.

Narrative

Reverberations

*Hard Endured
Story #3*

"I'm worried, 'cause she's moving in with my ex-husband. You know, I'm worried for my grandson. And I have this on my mind, if they had went and moved right away, it, it wouldn't be so bad, but it's, it's a long thing for me to keep thinking about it. My daughter tells me, 'Mom I'll be careful, I will watch him', but right now, she can't even take care of herself in the sense of pain, and going back to work, and going back to work, right? Now she's just, they

were really worried about her, you know, committing suicide, right? And stuff like that. And she wants help from her dad, her dad's gonna take care of everything. The bills, the rents, so she doesn't have to—'til she gets herself back, and she'll be seeing a psychiatrist" (research conversation, February 8, 2010).

Inquiring into Hard Story # 3

And from this told story, I hear your worry encompassing the next generation, your beloved grandchild, who you helped raise and who you love dearly. I also hear stories reverberating through generations. At the same moment I consider Canadian societal stories of child abuse and neglect. In so doing, I understand your generational endured hard stories as collateral damage accepted by Canadian society, unwilling to sufficiently invest in and protect children. I also understand your children as having been more likely to be abused because you were abused. And now your

grandchildren are caught within the plotline.⁸²

How do we interrupt a generational story? Does bearing witness help begin the process of retelling; in the listening have we co-composed a story to keep your grandchildren safe? I suspect not, because I am obliged to implicate complex societal stories which influence endured hard stories and which are resistant to change.⁸³

⁸² Bella noted that when she was 16, she told her parents that she did not want to have children because she saw her siblings hurt her parents and she saw their pain. She did not want to have children who would grow up to hurt her. (research conversation, July 5, 2011)

⁸³ Bella noted that she has consistently made a point of speaking about the abuse with her daughter in an effort to prevent her grandson experiencing abuse. She also spoke about repeatedly telling her grandson to avoid being alone with his grandfather (research conversation, July 2011).

Temporal Shifting

Hard Endured Story #4

Bella, you recently came to speak with me (February, 3, 2011) and you said, "Yes it seems one hard thing after another. Sometimes I am really down. I sit in my apartment and have a good cry. I try to see something positive. I always try to see the positive. Even when it is really bad, I must find something small, small that is good.

I get frustrated and mad. I get really angry because I always ask myself, what happened, what makes one person really smart so they can go to school and learn? I see people go to school and they get it and then another person can't. It was easy to blame school and the teachers. But you know, Sandra who chooses that? I did not want to believe it was me, because that is a real hard thing to look at."

And I asked, “Did you ever wonder, wait let me think, during the tutoring, did you feel you were getting it?”

You replied, “Sandra for a second I did. But it was not enough time. When you said, Bella, you got it, you are doing really well. I thought I am so normal, I got it. I can walk and be like other people. For that second it just felt so good (Bella is crying softly). Then when you told us we were reading at Grade 10 I wanted to fall back on the chair. But it was not enough. When you think about all the tripping, it is too short. Six months we tutored for, we needed 6 years, maybe. When I first got in there it took a long time to warm up. It felt like we were just finally getting to it and then we finished.

But, Sandra what you gave to me I can’t be bitter. What you gave to me a little bit of a light, I can do it. If I can do it, why should I be bitter? I was angry at who gets to be smart and who doesn’t. I am trying to figure out if school decides who gets to

be smart or it is me. It is a puzzle of the unknown, like why is the sky blue.” (February 3, 2011)

*Continuously
composed and
recomposed*

Bella Inquires into Hard Story #4

“I felt like a breakthrough. In my brain, oh my goodness I can actually do this, and at my age. And then I felt more better because you cared enough to take someone my age and don’t give up hope. Because when a person gets my age they say, okay, we don’t care anymore. It feels like that. If you are younger more people care, there is still a chance. When you get to a certain age they say, it is just going to be like this. So when they give up on me, it makes it even harder (research conversation, February 3, 2011).

Sandra Inquires into Hard Story #4

Thank you for sharing this story with me. When I attempt to hold all of the

endured hard stories you shared with me I am flooded with vivid images of the kinds of damage done and the resulting influences on one’s identities. Frye (1983) tells of the brutalization females endure when she described how the abuser “puts maximum force into the process of alienating her from herself through total helplessness. The result is a radical loss of self-esteem, self respect and any sense of capacity or agency” (p. 63).

When I attempt to call to mind images of women untouched by abuse, I understand greater possibilities for experiencing educative stories (Dewey, 1938). This in turn can support the process of weaving together counterstories to “resist an oppressive identity and attempts to replace it with one that commands respect” (Nelson, 2001, p. 6). I understand in part you have your identities, because of the generational abuse you and yours have endured. Moreover, I understand this is the case not solely because you

changed contexts, rather because changes were forced on you. So when you say it is like being a blind person who trips, I understand it more as a blind person who is repeatedly and violently pushed to the floor by those wanting to manipulate your circumstances to serve their needs. Their needs were inconsistent with your health; I understand this as coercion. I also understand your stories within societal stories where child abuse and neglect are tolerated.

Bella, I know you as clever, hard working, funny, kind and caring. In some ways I understand you know yourself through the perception of your abusers' oppressive valuations of you. When you shared stories of knowing yourself as capable, as having a "breakthrough in your brain," I understand in those moments you were unwilling to accept less than values of self and more likely to exercise your agency (Lindemann Nelson, 2001).

I wish identity shifts required a single experience to shift. I know this is not the case as it is multiple stories over time, little shifts, which allow for the creative acts of composing and recomposing shifts in identities. I understand your willingness and your desire to shift your identities as courageous. I also understand your voluntary involvement with our study as an act of creating, what Friedman (1992) referred to as a community of choice. She described them as "contexts in which to relocate and renegotiate the various constituents of our identities" (p. 95).

Moreover, when you became a parent, you experienced it "as a kind of empowerment After having been in a situation where . . . [your] presence as agent . . . [was] reduced to nothing, . . . [you] now had the opportunity to try to act in support of " (Frye, 1983, p. 63) your children and so you came to know yourself as a mother bear, one who did everything to support her children.

Bella, I also wanted to tell you some of the things I have learned from you. You have taught me that to know another I must "consult something other than [my] will and interests and fears and imagination. [I] must look at the thing. [I] must look and listen and check and question" (Frye, 1983, p. 75). Moreover, you have taught me to "know the complexity of [you] as something which will forever present new things to be known" (p. 76). Understanding this, I appreciate "the loving eye seems generous to its objects, though it means neither to give nor to take, for not being invaded, not being coerced, not being annexed must be felt in a world such as ours as a great gift" (Frye, 1983 pp. 75–76). And this great gift, Bella, you offered each time we met.

Chapter Six: Stories Which Shaped and are My Identities

“Each word quivers, trembles and ejects several meanings, even before insertion into a context” (Lichtenberg-Ettinger, 1994, p. 38) and “you can’t put together a memoir without cannibalizing your own life for parts. The work battens on your memories. And it replaces them (Dillard, 1987, p 156). Appreciating these quotes and understanding that meaning often shifts depending on context, I wonder how one selects stories from what Kerby (1991) referred to as “the cumulative horizontal structure of experience itself” (p. 21). In Jane Austen’s novel *Sense and Sensibility* (1811), Colonel Christopher Brandon, speaking to Elinor, hints at this dilemma, “but this will give you no idea—I must go farther back. You will find me a very awkward narrator, Miss Dashwood; I hardly know where to begin. A short account of myself, I believe, will be necessary” (p. 80). It is the tensions between *the need* to go back further, brevity, and the fluid meaning of words which I encounter as I compose this section. Moreover, it is the ongoing consideration of something Heilbrun (1997) wrote “what alterations in her life a woman might undertake upon turning fifty” (p. 1). This quandary lingers because as Heilbrun suggested, I want to consider my doctoral studies as a time to “see this new life as different, as a beginning, as a time requiring the questioning of all previous habits and activities, as, inevitably, a time of profound change” (pp. 1–2).

I have been a doctoral student for the previous four years and before that I was... and before that... Connelly and Clandinin (2006) wrote “that a particular person had a certain kind of history associated with particular present behaviours or actions that might seem to be projecting in particular ways into the future” (p. 479). I am a particular person with a certain kind of history. Ontologically I understand my certain history is shaping my present behaviours. I also understand my present actions shape future actions. At the beginning of the study I set out to

deepen understandings of what it means to live with literacies less than one desires, be attentive to identity shifts and wonder how each of us, Bella, Edith and I might influence the relational tutoring space. In part, what you will read through the next section is my particular kind of history and how this history shapes and re-shapes my present actions and my efforts to relive my future stories to live by.

Change has been a hallmark of my doctoral studies. To reflect upon my understanding of who I am and who I might be in the midst of temporally changing experiences is helpful in that it affords me an appreciation of my shifting identities and those persons, places, and contexts which influenced and continue to influence me. Bruner (1996) observed, “it is through our own narratives that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narratives that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members” (p. xiv). Moreover, change affords me multiple opportunities to be wakeful beyond my privilege, such that I am able and inclined to experience other “people’s accounts of how they are as testimonies to possibilities for being in the world, as opposed to exhaustive, absolute, accounts of reality” (O’Connell, 2001, p. xv). Waking up and wondering have been staples of my doctoral studies.

In the second semester of my studies whilst enrolled in the narrative inquiry class, a colleague asked me to share a cherished childhood memory. Wanting to avoid the topic of childhood in its entirety, I snapped, “I have none.” Days later I continued to mull over the query because the question had, as Kerdeman (2003) suggested, resulted in an experience of “being pulled up short” (p. 294).

I know myself as a woman with a paucity of cherished memories of elementary and high school and family. Therefore, I have never been particularly interested in “reanimating the ashes of childhood” (Minh-ha, 1994, p. 10). I do however have numerous fond memories which are

rooted in the physical geography of my childhood. Because this cherished geography cannot be carried with me when I am away, I never understood it as more than mere memories. Kerdeman (2003) suggested that “lived understanding is pre-reflective practical know-how, intimately tied to self-knowledge Lived understanding is not an achievement or state of mind we regulate and produce. Lived understanding signifies the existential condition of being human” (p. 295). My colleague’s question pulled this knowing up short, because when I think deeply about these cherished places: the lake, the escarpment, the land between, and the municipal pool—I understand them and name them as memories which shelter and nourish me when I am away, groping for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) upon lands which are foreign to me. I also know them and name them as places where I rested from the persistent, endured demands of home and school. Moreover, in my struggle for narrative coherence, I dichotomously labelled and over time came to know most of my early experiences as good or bad depending, in part, where they took place. My memories of experiences at the lake, escarpment, and pool were overwhelmingly positive; conversely, those I experienced at home and school were predominately negative.

Relph (1976) wrote:

The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines place as profound centres of human existence. There is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now, or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world. (p. 43)

When my colleague asked about fond childhood memories, I experienced precisely what Kerdeman (2003) wrote about when she described being pulled up short:

Being pulled up short invariably catches us off-guard, challenging “know-how” and its accompanying sense of security and control. Cherished self-assumptions are also thrown into doubt. Being pulled up short discloses attitudes, qualities and behaviours we would prefer to disown, deny or recognise only insofar as we project them onto others. (p. 296)

Thinking about my memories, I understand that I am rooted in the land where my body grew. I have an abundance of fond memories of the hours I spent on my own exploring. Hoffman (1989) described her knowing of childhood when she wrote “the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love” (p. 75). I wanted to embrace Hoffman’s knowing; however it would not co-exist comfortably with my early endured stories of school and family. My struggle for narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) was further complicated because I did not understand that which I was forced to endure. Hall and Burns (2009) argued to understand is to be at home, to feel we belong in our surroundings. I did not often experience this type of understanding at home or school. I did, however, experience it when I went outdoors to be upon the land, the lake, the escarpment, and at the municipal pool.

Over the next few months, my colleague’s question continued to annoy me as it drew forward childhood frustrations and it repeatedly circumnavigated a well-constructed cover story (Crites, 1971), including a morally justifiable, finger pointed directly at those who demanded I endure mis-educative (Dewey, 1938) experiences. With said finger pointed, I was always right, most things were either/or, and there was no need to wonder how past experiences were shaping current ones because I believed I had padlocked the past. Regardless of this belief, my annoyance continued. In response to this ongoing annoyance, the next time I returned to southern Ontario (December, 2008), I tentatively took my camera and went in search of the physical geography of my youth. I was apprehensive because I knew land development, erosion, and

memory would transact with my well-travelled self, a purposeful self who spent the intervening years composing and recomposing my identities away from hard, endured childhood stories of school and home. I experienced the camera I held as protective.

I went to visit the places of my childhood. I was born and raised in the Niagara Peninsula, a tiny tract of land which is, in part, bounded by two Great Lakes, Ontario and Erie. The peninsula stretches from the Niagara River to Hamilton, parallel to the shore of Lake Ontario. It is bisected by the Niagara Escarpment which begins in the United States of America and continues, running westwards to the Niagara River where it forms a stunning gorge, north of Niagara Falls. The peninsula is also bisected by the Queen Elizabeth Highway. Throughout my childhood, the highway expanded. In the process, land which once produced sweet, mouth-watering peaches, pears, apples, and cherries, food I ate straight from the trees, food which carried the sun's rays into my belly, was churned into a highway with an ever-increasing girth. It also served to mark the inhabitants of the town as living north or south of the highway.

My father and all fathers in the neighbourhood built my childhood home. It was located within a short walking distance of the southern shore of Lake Ontario, perhaps a 1-minute walk; we were two blocks from the shore. The community in which I lived was built cooperatively. Each family made a \$1000 down payment and each father contributed 1000 man hours of construction work. Most of the husbands were blue collar workers employed in Hamilton. All of the families were Christian and all, except one, was White. Most of the families had multiple children who attended the local public or Catholic schools.

There was and still is a park, the Murray Street Park, where I spent countless hours exploring the shoreline and hiding in the uneven land just in front of the lake. There was a slow, albeit visible retreat of land, as erosion constantly bit at the sedimentary rock. Trees would begin

to lean towards the lake as soil washed away from sizeable root systems. The slow falling-in of trees and the disappearance of play places helped me mark the passage of time. When I looked outward onto the lake I felt the open expanse of possibilities; I went often to the park. My friend who lived across the street had a grandfather named Papa. He frequently came to visit on Sunday afternoons. After dinner, he would take us to the park and push us very hard and high on the swings. This was a wondrous thing because when the swing reached its highest point I had a brief second when my view was otherworldly. On clear days I could see straight across the lake to the Toronto skyline. The lake and the escarpment were play places which physically cloistered my experiences because I knew them as boundaries not to be crossed; this comforted me. The lake and the escarpment were also places where I delineated experience because I knew them as safe, unlike my knowing of home and school. Moreover, when I looked out at the water or when I soared above the lake as Papa pushed my swing, I knew there was life to be lived away from home and school and one day I would be old enough to venture out.

The other land border which hemmed in my living was the Niagara Escarpment. From home to the head of the trail was a 40-minute walk, one I was permitted to take on my own from a relatively early age. This landform was acutely different from the open expanse of the lake. Here I always felt covered and occasionally frightened by the darkness created by the dense foliage. The rhythms of the escarpment were otherwise from the lake in that I accessed it three seasons of the year. In summer I climbed to the old quarry and roasted hotdogs and marshmallows and in the spring I went in search of wildlife, anything that fit inside a glass jar. In fall I ran up to the point because I wanted to look at the glorious colours as the defoliation process began and I wanted to set my eyes on the lake and Toronto from another vantage point. I

went to the escarpment less often because it was further away, nevertheless, when I did go, it completely captured me because it scared and excited me simultaneously.

Inquiring Into These Fond Memories

Today when I remember the places where I grew, I experience fond memories for all the out-of-home and out-of-school experiences which were intertwined with the physical landscapes. I have come to tell a story which I understand is grounded in the physical hemming in of lake and escarpment. I am a sleeper who most mornings wakes to find myself hemmed in to the wall. When I wake, tucked snugly against the wall, I open my eyes, scan the room, and experience deep feelings of comfort. This daily occurrence is in stark contrast to what I remember as a perpetual childhood desire and search for safety. My search occurred out of home and school because I storied those landscapes and the people who lived upon them as untrustworthy and volatile. In my storied memories, I regularly experienced tension when I came into relationship(s) with those living on home and school landscapes. McAdams (1993) reminds me that even before we consciously know what a story is, we are gathering material for the self-defining story we will someday compose. “From the early bond of attachment formed with our parents, [and teachers] our first year[s] of life leaves a legacy of optimism or pessimism that will influence the narrative tone we later adopt as adults” (p. 13).

As a child, in response to this tension, I went on my own to the lake, the escarpment, or the swimming pool. In my solitude there was no need to interact relationally with others. I liked being on the land and in the water. It soothed me, it intrigued me, it did so many things, and it rarely made me afraid; only people did that. Meanwhile at home, I learned to read and judge the subtle nuances of bodily expression and to react in my effort to be safe. At school, I quickly learned that I was the youngest sister of those brothers and that sister and perhaps most

importantly the daughter of that father. I was not entirely sure what the labels meant, however I did understand they were not advantageous. The stories of my siblings and father had plotlines of inferiority which I came to experience as shameful. Moreover, my highly-tuned reaction skills which were necessary upon my home landscape were not a particularly fruitful precursor to the development of friendships. Over time, I learned to be comfortable with my own company. My movement away from human relations was aided by my trekking onto the land and into the water because these things demanded little of me. I learned their seasonal rhythms and potential dangers at a young age and therefore felt confident to be upon them. At home, I developed a finely tuned set of skills which were honed in my efforts to be safe. Many of my memories of home and school were experiences where my stories bumped up against other ways of knowing and tension resulted (Clandinin, Huber, Huber, Murphy, Murrar Orr, Pearce, & Steeves, 2006). Desiring calm and tension-free moments, I went on frequent solo treks and in the process came to story myself as relationally incompetent. Moreover, my treks away from home were my efforts to know safety and therefore part of a desire to know the world and people other than those I met at home and school. My trekking was also a journey towards future stories when I too would be otherwise: socially competent and perpetually safe.

I also know that my early physical landscapes continue to resonate because I feel fully to life when situated within the dense, enveloping humidity created by two Great Lakes. I am also drawn to water and I suspect this is in part because of the countless hours I spent exploring and soothing my raged being along the shore of Lake Ontario and the daily summer swims in the municipal pool. Moreover, there are days here in Alberta when I feel completely landlocked and I long to set my eyes upon a massive body of water. There are other days when life in my wee flat is oppressive and at said moments, the call of the land is pounding and so I go in search of all

things physical to relive the ache of my living. I understand therefore, “when the world departs from [my] expectations and desires, [my] categories” (Kerdeman, 2003, p. 295), I know the physical geography where my body grew as temporally drawn forward in my efforts to create stories to carry me across liminal spaces (Buber, 1957).

Here in Edmonton, there are evenings, very late, when my yearning to take flight is inexhaustible. I put on my coat and take the 13 steps from the threshold of my flat to the outdoors. Once out in the open air I stand facing east, motionless and quiet. I conjure up images of my children, and the land where I grew, and I wait. Some days it comes rapidly and other days I experience the bitter Edmonton cold before it happens. Nevertheless, it never fails me; access, temporal shifting. I let it come upon me like an entreaty; I engage in none of my customary hard work at stoicism in my efforts to dike up emotion. I weep. When I am spent, I about-face and traverse the 13 steps, knowing I have been to Merleau-Ponty’s (1964) primordial soup; knowing that a world of otherwise is once again there for my imagining and engaging. This experience allows me to know the geography of my childhood as a resource which I do indeed carry away with me each time I travel away.

When I inquire into these events which I experienced with some regularity since coming to Edmonton, I see them as possibilities to awaken to an opportunity to shift my stories to live by. Initially I understood them as reaction stories to longing and loneliness. I now understand them as a series of experiences which scaffolded shifts in my identities, such that I am in an ongoing process of coming to know myself as capable of world travelling (Lugones, 1987) to places and experiences other than those of the temporal moment. Lugones described world travelling as “necessarily acquired flexibility in shifting from the mainstream constructions of life where one is constructed as an outsider to other constructions of life, where she is more or

less ‘at home’” (p. 3). This ability to world travel is a narrative thread of my identities which I understand was composed upon my early physical landscapes and within my family and school narratives. Here in Edmonton, when I longed for security, familiarity, family, and comfort, I took myself outside, filled my being with these early stories and with stories of my daughters and was able to world travel to comfort and feelings of belonging.

Living in Edmonton, Alberta, approximately 3,000 kilometres from home, I have positioned myself and over time have been positioned as a non-Albertan⁸⁴. Because I understand identity as multiple and fluid, I have simultaneously grown into and actively constituted myself (with generous support) as a member of a community within the CRTED. Within the Centre, over time, I have come to know myself as increasingly desiring and capable of community involvement. Four years of experience with the Centre has regularly interrupted my plotline of social incompetence. I have frequently experienced the crossing of borders (real and imagined) as I moved between Edmonton and the Niagara Region, between solo trekking and community involvement and between social incompetence and feelings of belonging. Through it all, I continued with a familiar story of physical geography to hem me in to my Edmonton life. Over time, I came to know and name the Rocky Mountains as a physical boundary which served to hem me in on the western front.

From these stories I understand that my initial inclination is not towards human relationships. It is the land and the physical geography which I turn to first, perhaps because their demands are few. I also understand that I possess a narrative thread of world traveler and this was born out of my childhood efforts to experience peace and security. Finally, I understand that I composed and recomposed stories on the land in part because of my family and school stories.

⁸⁴ I find this position increasingly amusing particularly since I recently forfeited my Ontario driver's license and am now a holder of one issued by the province of Alberta. I wonder if this officially makes me an Albertan.

In the next section, I have accounted for some of these early stories in my effort to understand the narrative beginnings of my research puzzle.

Stories from the Early Landscapes of Home and School

My wonderings about the veil of secrecy I so dutifully pulled over my early stories to live by began in the first semester of my program. Increasingly, I contemplated my willingness or lack thereof to think about, read about, and ultimately write about my childhood. Ontologically, I do not think I have readily available access to primordial landscapes, however, like Greene (1995), I believe imagination provides pathways towards glimpses and understandings of early landscapes. I wondered what I might know or understand from my early years. Moreover, because Greene argued education suggests a way to resist the oppression of private, daily life, I hoped I might find a way out of the repetitive loop of self-loathing that I occasionally experienced. In Greene's argument, she called a child fortunate if she had teachers who led her to inhale music, dance, literature, and other forms of art. For this child, Greene believes, is capable of imagining the living of others and in so doing comes to understand and appreciate what it means to be human, living within community. Moreover, because I know the world through Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, I understand that my early stories to live by contribute to the tedium of the day-to-day grind where, according to Greene, living exists, however "habit swathes everything, one day follows another identical day and predictability swallows any hint of an opening possibility" (p. 23). In keeping silent, I have not afforded myself any hint of an opening possibility, however, the "habit [continuously] swathes everything" (Greene, 1995, p. 23).

I pursued doctoral studies in part as my effort to change character traits which I believed I possessed and which I did not appreciate. I was of the mind that I had put forth Herculean efforts

and still there were times when I behaved in fashions which later sent me into repetitive loops of self loathing. I imagined I would read something and/or come to understand something which would *fix* the qualities I did not value. During my first term in the curriculum studies course and then again during the narrative inquiry class I took in the second semester, I began to wonder about my silence. Reading Greene (1995), I wondered about the *bigness* of my early stories.

Greene (1995) wrote about seeing big. She argued that by seeing big, we refuse epistemologically to consider people as objects; rather we view them embodied in the particularities of their lives. From this epistemological standpoint, Greene believes we can see people in the midst of their living and if we are attentive listeners, we can be privy to their plans, initiatives, and the fears they face. I wondered if I could do this for myself and I suspected I needed a go at it if I was to successfully conduct research which utilized a narrative inquiry methodology and therefore relied and sought to foreground relationships with participants. And in the midst of these wonderings, I was listening to Jean. As a student in her class, I was reading and meeting other voices in the literature and the voices of classmates. Through it all I was beginning to break through the habitual, non-seeing routine of my living. With my Greene-like imagination (accessible, practical, and participatory) developing, I slowly began to wonder about the people (including myself) who inhabited my early stories.

Stories from the Early Landscapes

For me, restricted then to the compound, the chief attraction of the city was a random selection of books that Auyb brought to me. Every few days he appeared at my door, grinning hopefully and handing the bundle of books to me as if they were treasures from an archaeological dig (Roberts, 2003, p. 377).

Like the protagonist in Robert's autobiography, books have always been meaningful to me. It was my great fortune to have been a child who, while sitting next to older, reading siblings, inhaled the transactional art of reading and comprehension. My mother reports I went to school reading; she believes I was highly motivated as my older sister and brothers were readers. I have absolutely no recollection of reading instruction, however, I do remember I was regularly sent to the library, as I was considered a naughty and talkative student who quickly finished the assigned work and then set about bothering my neighbours.

It was in my elementary school library where I first encountered a series of book by British author Mary Norton. These books gave my mind transport to other worlds. In reading them, I was afforded an opportunity to do precisely as Greene (1995) suggested—I imagined a living devoid of chaos, the overwhelming bigness of my own life. Reading these books I manoeuvred away, if only briefly, from the oppression which frequently results when a parent consumes alcohol in excess. Moreover, I moved away from the oppression I regularly experienced as a result of the predominately patriarchal paradigm in which I grew. Sicherman (2010) wrote,

at all ages girls and women read more fiction than do boys and men. The reasons for this predilection have yet to be fully explored; among those advanced are . . . their need to find satisfaction unavailable in other ways. (p. 2)

In Norton's book *The Borrowers* (1953), I met 13-year-old Arrietty Clock, a female heroine who lived with her parents underneath the wooden floor in a house occupied with regular-sized folks. Arrietty's family was labelled the Borrowers because their existence depended on their ability to successfully borrow from the regular-sized people who lived above them. I think this living, just out of sight, appealed to me because it suggested there was a world

where I could place myself and I would be safe from the chaos which often shrouded my childhood home. Moreover, I was a child who often experienced acute loneliness. When Arrietty met and befriended a big-folk boy who had arrived from India to recover from a sickness, I imagined my maternal grandmother ringing our home and asking me to come and stay. I saw myself surrounded by hordes of kindly cousins and doting grandparents. I was keenly aware that none of my imaginings would occur in the short run; however, they did allow me to realize there was life outside of my father's rod iron grip. I remember lying in my bed imagining a life other than my own. I took details from the books I was reading and I built them into my world until their realness resonated. Sicherman (2010) noted, "books provided women not with an exact template or blueprint, but with malleable forms that could be tried on for fit, to be emulated, appropriated, discarded when no longer useful" (p. 2).

At one point, Arrietty's father forbade her to go borrowing and so she was unable to meet with her new friend. To this day, I recall the sadness and anger I experienced when Arrietty's father announced his irrevocable edict. A few days later, when Arrietty went out on a secret borrowing trip, I cheered her on and I began to think I might take myself out and so I refocused my efforts to trek to the lake and escarpment, elsewhere of my father's world. Moreover, when the boy agreed to take a letter Arrietty had written and attempt to deliver it, I experienced words, not only as things to be thrown around to injure, but also as things that contained hope. When the boy was found out and beaten, I was reassured, knowing there were others. Strangely, this knowledge comforted me because it was not until I went to high school that I met kids who were willing to talk about their fathers.

When I read as a child, I was able to imagine an existence that was risk-free and most importantly possible. The worlds I went to through the books I read were dramatically different

from the one I found myself in. In high school, a history teacher gave me a book by American author Pat Conroy and I was sure the author had spent evenings as a fly on the wall in our home. Reading Conroy's book, I temporally shifted and re-experienced childhood fear, hope, and occasionally salvation. His books, particularly *The Great Santini* (1976), introduced me to men: violent, powerfully flawed, who, in spite of their living, loved their families and so I did not learn to hate. I imagined a lack of hate because of Pat Conroy's stories. Had I not read, I believe I would be less. Sicherman (2010), when describing the reading habits of women born between the years of 1855 and 1875 noted, "as both a personal resource and a cultural system, reading allowed young women to enter an imaginative space that might provide a bridge to their future lives as they navigated difficult terrain" (p. 3). While I often struggled to understand complexity in the midst of my need for dichotomous labels, reading allowed me to know and experience complexity. Reading then was a resource and it was a place where I fully engaged my imagination, such that I knew myself free of familial dysfunction; I was otherwise. Sicherman wrote, "women read and reworked stories for themselves and intimate friends in ways that generated new narratives with which to construct less restrictive lives" (p. 3).

I continued to travel read⁸⁵ into adulthood. I remember a day when I was a graduate student at Brock University. I had gotten into the habit of going to the main bank of elevators in the library, entering, closing my eyes, and then reaching out to select a floor. Once on the floor I would walk amidst the stacks of books and make selections as they caught my attention. I adored this process for I never knew which author or which ideas I would meet and therefore, where I would travel. One day I was on the eighth floor and I selected a book from the shelves and sat

⁸⁵ I understand books as transport vehicles. When I read a book I journey (travel read) to ways of knowing and experiencing which are different from how I know the world, or which deepen my understandings of how I know and experience my stories to live by.

down to scan it. *Codependent No More* (Beattie, 1987) is a book about alcoholism. I began reading slowly and cautiously and when I next bumped into structured time, more than 3 hours had passed and I was almost finished the text. This book did for me what Greene (1995) suggested, it gave my lingering memories context, meaning, and value. Once again I deepened my understandings of books as more than great reads. As Chartier (1994) argued, reading was helping me construct meaning because, from the text, I appropriated personal meaning.

Finally, I am remembering one of my teachers, Mr. Taleri. This daft man did not understand that there is very little to do by way of threatening the child of an alcoholic. He was convinced he was going to cure me of my naughty, talkative behaviour by having me write out pages from an orange dictionary. Each day and each recess, I was told to copy out pages from said dictionary; I would not. Mr. Taleri and I were immediately engaged in a battle of wills, one I would ultimately win, however at the time he was sure that I would comply. I understood it would do nothing to change my naughty behaviour, so of course, I refused.

During the first recess when I should have been writing out pages, I recalled a story my mother told my sister and me. She told us about playing a game with one of her sisters. My aunt would memorize how to spell the words and my mother memorized the meanings. My acutely precocious mother (she skipped two grades) told us words were her friends and had been for as long as she could remember. My mother stutters and from what I have come to understand she was teased mercilessly; I wonder if she went to the worlds within words for comfort. The idea, therefore, of spending recess reading the dictionary appealed to me, as did the self-imposed martyr sign I had secretly and silently hung around my neck. I was a hero in a novel and there was not a teacher on the earth who would get me to write out a single dictionary page. I read in

protest. Radway (1991) described the reading habits of housewives in part as self-assertion and as protest to the existence they endured.

One day, while walking in the hall en route to the bathroom, I encountered the principal, who commented that he had not seen me out for recess in quite some time. I explained to him in great detail my current and ongoing punishment. He listened intently and went on his way. The next recess when I got out my orange dictionary, Mr. Taleri barked at me, ordering me outside. I knew the righteous hero had won, and in the process learned hundreds of new words. When I think back on these experiences, I understand them as my efforts to connect with my mother's early living, a precarious young student who was tormented because of her speech impairment. When I began reading and enjoying the dictionary, I did so partly because, in my imagined world, I was defending my mother from her bullies while at the same time I was refusing my own, Mr. Taleri. I don't suspect I would have had the courage to deny him and his dictionary page writing edict if my mother had not told me her dictionary story. I think this is an example of Merleau-Ponty's (1964) perceiving and of Greene's (1995) travelling along other paths while seeing big.

Greene (1995) argued said transporting vehicles are not limited to the written word. When I was a child, my mother had a coffee table book which contained the artwork of famous European painters. I spent countless hours gazing upon the images— they fascinated me: the colors, the lines, the naked bodies, and the brief description of the work all captured my attention. Over time, I began to think of the paintings as my own because they moved me, they allowed me to pause and consider, and each painting was a new experience.

In all of these experiences, as Greene (1995) suggests, I found a place where I could struggle towards an ongoing integration of what I was experiencing and what I might become.

Literature offered many possibilities and I eagerly considered them for they made visible pathways I had not experienced in the banality of my own early stories to live by. Rather, they were ones I experienced because of the artist's willingness to create and my ability to do likewise. While I endured my living, it was the slow and often repetitive readings of so many books that allowed new experiences and this, Greene says, is the gateway to imagination. Sometimes I wonder if my early years are partly responsible for my unwillingness to live only within the grand narrative (Lindemann Nelson, 2001). In so living, I have come to see the range of possibilities grow significantly larger and I understand this largeness that I present to students, many of whom come up *short* because of the deficit model schools and institutions employ with children who have learning disabilities. All of this I have done to cast meaning upon my living, to make epistemological sense if sense can be found in the home of an alcoholic. I have also done this in an effort to strengthen my capacity for kindness across the boundaries of my comfort zone into what Greene described as human communities, surrounded by compassion.

Teaching Stories

I began teaching as a teenager when I was hired to instruct swimming. When I graduated from university with a degree in urban and regional planning, I worked as a planner for a social service agency. It did not take long for me to grow discontented with the work. I remember contemplating another line of work. I had this idea that whatever it was I was meant to do, I had some prior experience. When I reflected on the work I had done, I repeatedly came back to instructing swimming. I particularly liked working with students, adults, and children who were acutely fearful of water. It was something about the initial, palpable fear and the often subsequent ability to swim which resonated with me. I decided to apply to faculties of education. My career began at inner city schools as kindergarten teacher, then teacher-librarian, and teacher

of English as a subsequent language. I left the publically-funded system and moved to an independent school where I worked as a teacher-librarian and as a teacher of English Language Arts. My last move was to open a literacy clinic to support students who were struggling with literacies. When I consider the trajectory of my career, I am guided by notions forwarded by Clandinin and Connelly (1995) who coined the term professional knowledge landscape to describe and understand schools.

Within a school landscape, they suggested there are two “fundamentally different places, the in-classroom place and the out-of-classroom place” (p. 151). Having inquired into the stories of career path I now understand I wanted to work exclusively in the in-classroom place because I had a sense of what Connelly and Clandinin (1988) wrote about when they encouraged readers to think about curriculum not as the documents which are written and published by provincial governments, but rather as “one’s life course of action. It can mean the paths we have followed and the paths we intend to follow” (p. 1). I sensed students were being shaped by their literacy experiences and I wanted to work with them.

The vast majority of work I have done as a literacy clinician has been with children. However, my interest in and curiosity about women is grounded in two stories. First, I believe it is grounded in the situation, continuity, and interaction of my youth, such that as a young female of the 1960s, my desires were secondary to those of older brothers and males in general. When I was a child I knew that what I was feeling was a result of male privilege. Even then, although I did not have appropriate words to describe it, I knew it was wrong. I have drawn this knowing forward such that I story myself as a feminist. Considering Dewey’s notion of continuity and Kerby’s (1991) idea of habitus, I believe my concern for women has been lifelong; it is a concern and curiosity I am always inclined to engage in. Women’s issues continue to resonate with me

today and they have grown in their ability to capture my attention as I have learned more about narrative conceptualizations of identities and the possibility for identity shifts when I became the mother of daughters. Next, I believe my concern is grounded in a story which occurred approximately 8 years ago.

I am a woman who loathes shopping. When I do find myself in need of an item and when I am unable to convince my partner of the merits of him going in search of said item, I force myself to venture out to a store. When our daughters were young they quickly came to recognize my aversion. On the rare occasion when we did enter a shopping mall, we would stop before the doors and review exactly what we were in search of. They knew to be quick and to stay focussed on the items on my list. Occasionally I was overcome with bits of guilt when women friends described pleasurable Saturday afternoons spent shopping with their daughters. In response to this guilt I would, on a rare occasion, perhaps two or three times a year, pick the girls up from school and take them shopping with no list in hand. The first time it happened, they were stunned. However, being quick studies, they learned to make hay when the sun was shining because I had about a 30 minute window of tolerance and then I would march them to the closest exit door.

One particular day I picked them up after school and drove to the nearest mall. En route, I explained what we were doing and asked if there was something special they would like me to buy for them. They conversed in whispers and then declared they wanted track suits; they preferred them to be name-brand—Adidas or Nike, and they wanted black. Remembering that I had invited them and appreciating their willingness to be exact, I led them into Sears. My youngest child, who even at age 8 seemed to have a gift for shopping, took us to the children's section and immediately found black Adidas track suits. Much to my amazement, they were

precisely what the girls wanted and the required sizes were hanging on the rack. They quickly went and tried them on and then we proceeded to the check-out. The girls were thrilled as was I, feeling I had done a good thing in letting them choose. They were moving about, looking at things and enjoying the moment. There was one woman paying for her purchase and then one other woman in front of me. I was wishing things would hurry up when I noticed the woman ahead of me was engaged in a series of actions which I did not understand. She had her daughter, who looked to be about 10, standing very close to her and they were whispering over and over again. The child was tapping on her mother's hand and I wondered if perhaps she was blind. This was not the case however, because the woman repeatedly looked up so she would know when it was her turn. My curiosity got the best of me and I found myself moving closer. Having done so, I saw the woman had a child's bathing suit in one hand and a receipt in the hand her daughter was tapping on. The receipt had highlighted marks drawn horizontally through the various lines. The child whispered over and over "Green, line one is the price; red, line two is the tax; and yellow, line three it reads, this sale is final". As the child whispered to her mother she tapped her hand, one tap for line one, two taps for line two, and three taps for line three. All the while the woman kept a watchful eye on the customer in front of her. At precisely the moment the cashier thanked the customer, the woman gently moved her daughter to the side and stepped up to the counter. The little girl tentatively moved in the direction of my daughters. Her mother gingerly placed the bathing suit on the counter with one hand and reached her other hand, the one with the receipt in it, onto the counter, without letting go of it. She said, "I see it says here, that the item is a final sale, but I want you to know, when we got it home, we noticed it had a rip in the liner, so I want to return it." The cashier examined both the suit and the receipt and said, "I will have to call the manager." At this moment, the woman turned away from the counter and immediately caught

her daughter's attention. The child stopped chatting with my girls and returned directly to the counter and began speaking with her mother. The cashier attempted to engage in conversation with the woman; however, she kept her attention on her daughter. A few moments later when the supervisor arrived, she gently directed her daughter away from the counter and then repeated the exact dialogue she had spoken to the cashier a few minutes earlier. It was at this moment I realized the woman could not read. I stood stunned. I remember thinking she was about my age. I wondered what other compensatory strategies she had developed and how else her daughter was helping her to navigate as a non-reader. In the end, her money was refunded; I felt like cheering for the woman.

When I inquire into this story using Connelly and Clandinin's (2000) metaphorical, three-dimensional narrative inquiry spaces, many thoughts come to mind. First it occurs to me that the woman and I were attempting to do something with our daughters and we were both successful. However, because I can read, I was afforded an opportunity to allow my attention to float without having to attend in a hyper-focussed manner to a tiny piece of paper or without having to draw my girls into what Crites (1979) called cover stories. It does seem to me that this non-reading woman had done a better job than I had of doing what Crites (1971) suggested when he wrote that cover stories need not be an ending. From what I observed, the woman had faced her inability to read and, in so doing, had developed compensatory strategies to successfully navigate. I suspect these actions required a considerable amount of thought, planning, and practice. I, on the other hand, had made no effort to re-tell or re-story my aversion to shopping. I had taken my daughters out with no plan to navigate the negative feelings I often experience when shopping. Moreover, I ventured out to the mall in response to the guilt I felt for not having provided my children with pleasurable afternoons of shopping. When I lay my cover story and

subsequent actions alongside the thoughtful and reflective behaviour of the woman, I am of the mind that her behaviour is indicative of success, whereas mine was thoughtless reaction.

Moreover, when I wonder about and inquire into my aversion for shopping, it doesn't take much effort to recall ghastly experiences I had as a child. I remember wishing I could disappear as my father, in a loud voice, verbally abused the counter staff if things did not proceed as he believed they ought to. Because my mother could not drive, there was no way around his presence. It seems to me that the woman had been thoughtful about her actions, whereas I had gone out with no compensatory strategies at the ready other than a fast march to the exit doors.

Inquiring further into this story, I wonder how long the woman had required compensatory strategies. When had she realized she could not read, how old had she been, and how had it had made her feel? Also, I wondered which elementary school she had attended, who taught her in the early primary grades, and what had her teachers believed about her. And was she a high school graduate? These were some of the questions which I would have liked to have had answered. Thinking about Dewey's notion of interaction, I wondered what it meant to her, to be a little girl, like her own daughter, but unable to read. What had it meant to her as she grew? What did it mean to her parents? Because nothing about her speech suggested that English was not her mother tongue, I had no reason to think it was an issue of a subsequent language. I was most struck by continuity in terms of future stories. I wondered if the child was having experiences which might influence a future story of herself as helper. As I watched it was remarkable to see how the woman had learned to navigate with her daughter as helper. This made me wonder about the forward, temporal reverberations of stories to live by. Moreover, I wondered how the little girl storied her mother's inability to read. When I saw the woman had been successful in her desire to return the bathing suit she had purchased for her child, I saw the

experience as successful on many levels. One, the child had learned to help her mother using a multi-sensory approach: the colors, the tapping, and the whispering. This is precisely what I do when a student is repeatedly unable to retain new learning. This indicated deep levels of knowing how one best learns. I also thought about the length of time the woman had been a non-reader and how the years had impacted her identities. Specifically, I wondered if the habitus of non-reader could be interrupted by literacy tutoring and if an interruption was possible, would it broaden the range of educative experiences open to the woman and her daughter?

When the mother twice moved her daughter away from the counter and the adults, I suspect she was attempting to close the door on any alternative understandings. I believe she wanted to appear in command of the situation, able to read, and not requiring her child's assistance, which she was able to do. As we stood in line, the woman and her daughter had their backs turned to the cashier who had no clue about any of the intensive, pre-exchange activity. Perhaps this behaviour calls to mind the issue of shame; the woman did not want to be known as a non-reader. This story deepens my understanding of the complexities of stories to live by and how experience influences and shapes future experience. Moreover, it illuminates how stories to live by are embedded within the narratives in which one lives (Clandinin et al., 2006). It also makes me wonder what can be learned from attending to the broader societal narratives within which women with literacies at a lower level than they desire live. In the opening pages of the Ontario Ministry of Education's Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1–8 Language (revised, 2006) the following statement appears, taken from the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

Literacy is about more than reading or writing—it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and

culture. Those who use literacy take it for granted-but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today's world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of "literacy as freedom." (UNESCO, Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003 p. 4)

This story also begs me to consider the notion of success because both the woman and I left the mall having accomplished something. Today, however, I am able to think about my discomfort with shopping as tension that occurs when I bump up against unexamined stories to live by. Originally, I thought my experience in the mall had not resulted in a shrinking of options from which to compose my stories to live by. Today that is precisely how I view it because I appreciate that my actions were reactive and therefore not selected from a broad spectrum of options which might have been available to me. I believe a broad spectrum of choice from which to respond was unavailable to me because I had not interrupted, nor inquired into my early story to live by as it relates to my aversion of shopping. The forward reach and influence of my early stories to live by are, as Dewey (1938) argued, grounded in continuity such that "every experience both takes up something from the those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 35).

From these experiences I wonder if they served to broaden or shrink "the possibilities from which individuals compose their lives" (Clandinin et al., 2006). In the case of the woman, her inability to read had and was shaping not only her identity, but that of her daughter. Today I believe my experiences were shaping my identity and that of my daughters and not in ways that serve to broaden possibilities. I wonder if the cover story the woman worked so diligently at is evidence of the identity-shaping influences of literacies. I think about this mother and wonder what it would mean to her stories to live by, her identities and that of her daughter if she engaged

in literacy tutorials. Finally, this story allows me to think about curriculum as so much more than what appears in the provincial Ministry of Education documents. And, as a tutor, my understanding of self as a maker of curriculum deepens because I am able to appreciate that the work I do is not only having an impact on my stories to live by, but also those of my students and their families.

Through this process of telling and inquiring into my narrative beginnings, I have deepened my understanding of the complexity of stories to live by, narrative conceptualizations of identities and identity shifts and the shaping and influence of experience. I have also come to appreciate some of my own identity threads, one who draws comfort from physical geography, world traveller, and one capable of imagining future stories to live by which broaden the range of educative experiences I can choose from to compose my life. Through the telling and retelling of my stories I have come to know that my identities were in part composed and recomposed in relation to others' stories to live by. Moreover, I now understand that some experiences (in my case the early familial dysfunction) serve to keep me asleep to the stories of others and that sometimes, therefore, a disruption of these stories can create a space for reflection and the possibility for reliving. With curiosity for identities, identity shifts, women, and literacies my research puzzle was constructed.

Study Stories: As We Prepared and Waited

When I completed my course work, I began to work on my candidacy paper. I also began a weekly, 60-minute, one-on-one conversation with my supervisor. Each Tuesday morning at 9:00 a.m., I sat across the table from Dr. Clandinin and we spoke. These weekly meetings were a place where I could share experiences and wonder about how both my and the participants' identities were being shaped and re-shaped. In the section which follows, I have written about

three experiences. I have selected these particular stories because I experienced them as ongoing moments of tension and because they afforded me multiple opportunities to think about who I am as a tutor, a researcher, a woman and perhaps most importantly to wonder who I am and who I might be in the relational space between. Wondering who I might become are wonders about possible shifts in my identities.

From Bus Driver to Crew Member

As a tutor of students struggling with a provincially mandated Language Arts curriculum, I always experienced a sense of urgency. There were two reasons for this. First, I understood that when a child was engaged in a process of remediating weaknesses, her fellow students had not stopped learning. I understood this to mean not only did the child have to remediate existing weaknesses, she also had to close the gaps between herself and her peers. Next, before opening the literacy clinic, I taught English Language Arts. This provided me with a keen understanding of what often seemed to be an endless number of outcomes a child was expected to master over the course of a year. These two ways of knowing resulted in me experiencing a sense of urgency from the moment I met a child and her family until the moment I understood the child had closed the gaps, remediated the weaknesses, learned to self-advocate and learned to utilize assistive technology.

When I, alongside Dr. Clandinin, imagined up the study, we spoke about the differences between students in my clinic, who were predominately children and the women who would be participants. The women were different in that they were not currently engaged in efforts to pass elementary or high school. Moreover, they had self-identified as wanting to improve their literacies, unlike the students in my clinic who were brought to me by concerned parents. Furthermore, I was increasingly aware of the notion of alongside and my desire to be mindful of

the relational space between myself and the participants. In spite of these considerations, I quickly came to understand as I sat in my apartment and listened to digital recordings of the tutoring sessions, that in the classroom space, I was the driver in the bus with the gas pedal pushed to the floor. This positioning was familiar to me and, as noted previously, was based on my personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). The trouble was that as I listened to the recordings, I heard my voice, its stress, tone, and intonation and I heard the women withdraw. The following is a snippet from a tutoring session (January 28, 2010). Bella was reading a page from Kit Pearson's book *The Lights Go On Again* (1993)

Bella: But he didn't mind all the hugs and kisses and mushy nicknames.

Sandra: Bella slow down.

Bella: Aunt Florence often told Gavin how much he was like Hugh, her son who had been killed long ago in another world war.

Sandra: Bella take a breath, slow down.

Bella: Sometimes she went on too much about his clothes, or how blue his eyes were. But when

Sandra: Bella stop at the period.

Bella: But when he (Bella read polished) politely objected she would laugh, hug him, and stop. (Pearson, 1993, p. 11)

Sandra: Okay Bella stop. What are you going to do with this word? What strategies do you have?

Two things happened when I listened to this recording. First, I was struck by my pedagogy because I heard my voice and knew it as relentless. Next, I understood I had not attended to Bella. I focussed on the reading and in so doing I failed to attend to the woman who

was doing the reading. In response, each time I commented, I heard Bella withdraw. Her voice became quieter, her willingness to try lessened, she sped up, calling out words, and she refused to engage in post-reading discussion, which thankfully I did not insist upon.

The next time I met with Dr. Clandinin, I spoke about this experience. I described Bella as a turtle who receded into the protection of her shell each time I offered comment. I spoke about my discomfort when listening to the tape and how I wanted to improve. Jean asked me to think about who I was in the relational space in between the moments when Bella was receding. She also asked me to think about who I might be. I left her office and headed downstairs to tutor.

Throughout the study, day one, or 6 months later upon completion, I always experienced a similar feeling. My office is on the 6th floor of the building. The room where I tutored was on the 2nd floor. I would take the stairs down and exit from the stairwell into the hallway. Just as I turned into the hallway, I would feel my breath catch in my chest as I looked down the long, poorly lit corridor. Bella and Edith would sit on a bench and wait for me, particularly on Tuesday mornings when I was in a supervisory meeting with Dr. Clandinin from 9:00–10:00. Each time I entered the hallway, I squinted my visually impaired eyes and looked down the hall, wondering, and to a certain degree panicking, about whether they had returned for another day of tutoring and another day of our study.

On the Tuesday morning following my conversation with Dr. Clandinin about who I am and who I might be in the relational space, I headed downstairs, experienced the catch in my chest and a tiny wave of panic, and then saw both women. I said good morning and we walked towards the classroom. Later in the day I wrote the following journal entry:

This driver in the bus, pedal to the floor analogy is NOT working. I do not want to be, such that Bella and Edith shrink back. I want to be such that they are willing to take a

risk, willing to know themselves as readers, as capable. I understand I am not responsible for Bella and Edith; I am responsible for myself. So Sandra, who is it you will be the next time you tutor. How will you position yourself and how will this positioning shape what Bella and Edith learn. (Sandra journal entry, February 9, 2010)

I thought about the driver in the bus. I went back and listened to the recording of the tutoring until I felt one more listen was a purposeful act of self-injury. I thought about and experienced the exhaustion I often endured when pushing students so hard, pushing a single agenda—mine. I understood this way of knowing, this slice of my personal practical knowledge positioned me as the only justifiable source of knowledge. This in turn made me think about the issue of power and how my way of being was producing a one-way, hierarchal flow from me to Bella and Edith. I wondered how they were experiencing it and knew their retreat was in part indicative of their experiences. I also wondered how my way of being was calling forward their knowing from early school landscapes. From what they had told me about school experiences, I imagined my way of being was limiting who they might be. I also hoped it was somehow providing opportunities. In trying to unpack the tacit assumptions inherent in how I positioned myself, Bella, and Edith, and in my efforts to know and name how my way of being was negatively impacting the relational space, I began to wonder about other ways of being a teacher.

I looked to and listened to colleagues and fellow researchers. I listened at research issues⁸⁶ as colleagues, particularly Sonia Houle, spoke about foregrounding the well-being of the student and listening to the student while co-constructing curriculum with input from the students. I also thought about the years I spent on a rowing team of eight women. I wondered what it would mean to me, my pedagogy, and the relational spaces if I knew myself as a member

⁸⁶ Every Tuesday between 12:30 and 2:00 I attend research issues, a meeting within the Centre for Research and Development for Teachers. This meeting is an opportunity for students and faculty to discuss their work. It is a community of which I am a participating member.

of a team. On this team, each woman pulled in the same direction and the boat went faster when each member was fully contributing. I also thought about those early morning practices when a coach would have some of the rowers sit at the top of their slide so the women behind could work on a specific bit of technique. In these moments, if I was not being instructed, I would rest. I also thought about the coxswain, of which I was never one. While it was her voice which guided us safely down the course, it was not her physical efforts which directly influenced our speed and therefore progression. I began to consider shifting who I was in the classroom and who I was in the relational space. This thinking also influenced how I was thinking about literacy tutorials. I knew I was in the midst, shifting my ways of knowing from a deficit-oriented, neutral set of skills to be mastered towards a knowing where skills are embedded within issues of identities, agency, power, positioning, culture, and histories of teachers and students.

A few weeks later, Edith and Bella were at the whiteboard; we were practicing sentence writing and spelling. Bella had arrived that morning and told us she had not slept and she was not feeling well. I learned that on these days it was critical to proceed gently or the women would sometimes withdraw into themselves. We had just taken a bathroom break and I asked the women to go to the board and write sentences using the vocabulary words we were learning in our novel study and which we had discussed earlier in the morning. Bella wrote the following sentence: In im hose I werk in whut cutlereee.

I remained silent while wondering which vocabulary word she had included. I was happy to note that each word had a vowel. I understood this as progress. Bella stepped back from her work and did exactly what we had been working at. She read the sentence slowly, word by word, using her hand, matching sounds to symbols, proceeding carefully and thoughtfully. The second time she corrected the sentence to: In my hose I werk in the cutlereee.

Again she stood back and looked at it, read it quietly and continued to correct.

I was eager to jump in and offer suggestions, however, I thought about who I wanted to be and who I hoped Bella would be and I remained silent.

She then wrote: In my hosue I work in the skuleree.

I remained silent and Bella, stepped back, sub-vocalized words and sounds I could not hear and wrote: In my house I work in the skullery. (tutoring session, February 11, 2010)

At this point she turned to me, looking for my response.

I was stunned and unsure how best to respond. Bella had taken an idea from her mind and moved it to the board. Once she had it on the board, she worked with it, struggled with it, to make it coherent. Drawing forward her knowing of the words' meanings, of sentence structure and spelling, she wrote a magnificent sentence. Throughout the process I remained silent. When she turned to me for confirmation, I was smiling hard and long. I told Bella her sentence was magnificent and perfect. Increasingly, from that day forward, if I had the good sense to be silent, Bella read more accurately, wrote more accurately, and was more willing to engage. In my silence, she crept out of the shell. When I did speak, I tried to be mindful of each word, of what it meant, and how my words positioned both me and Bella.

A second story, which developed forward through time and reverberated backwards with stories from early landscapes, began with the stories both women told of abuse and neglect and stories which later went on to involve Bella's daughter and beloved grandson.

Bella and Edith's Told Stories

As was noted in Bella and Edith's told stories, both women endured abuse. Bella's stories of abuse included stories of her children enduring abuse at the hands of their father. I knew these stories because she had told them to me during the initial research conversations. Before

beginning the study, I had made a plan to transcribe each research conversation after it happened in an effort to stay on top of the work. Because I wanted to write in my journal following the conversation and following the transcribing, I did not want too much time to pass between the actual conversation and the journal writing.

I kept to my plan to transcribe the research conversations, except for the 2 hours when Bella first shared hard, endured stories of abuse. For the longest time, the digital recordings sat on my laptop; I avoided them. In part, the stories frightened me because I could not hear them without conjuring up images of Bella as a child in the midst of the abuse. Moreover, the stories Bella told of the abuse her children endured were told with detail. In the days which followed the telling, I walked around the university physically shaking my head, trying to shake the stories out. I did not want to think about them, nor did I want movies running in my head with Bella and her children being abused. I spoke with Dr. Clandinin about my experiences with these endured hard stories and she reminded me they were not my stories. She also asked me to think about who I was when I listened and to remember what Bella and Edith had signed up for when they agreed to participate in the study. We wondered what it meant to listen as a researcher. Dr. Clandinin also asked me to think about the questions I asked. In conversation with a colleague, I was explaining how difficult it was to listen to hard stories. She wondered if I thought my reaction to the endured hard stories was normal. This thinking was helpful; however it did little to prepare me for the following experience.

In late February 2010, we finished our class and Edith left quickly as she had an appointment. Bella and I lingered as we packed up our things. We left the classroom and headed along the long corridor towards the elevator. We were walking side-by-side, not facing each other. Bella began telling me her daughter Kyla was considering moving to the city where her

dad lived. The father had told Kyla that she and her son could stay with him as long as they liked. For a moment I was stunned. I quickly regrouped because in a tiny, fleeting second, I reasoned that Bella had remarried and the father her daughter knew and was considering moving in with was a second husband, her step-father and surely not the same man who had abused her. I asked and Bella said no, it was the father who had abused Kyla.

Again I was stunned; reaction was on my lips, in my voice, in my body, upon me. I remained silent. We stood in front of the elevator doors, waiting. I was silent. Bella lowered her head and whispered, “Sandra, Kyla promised she would watch him,” and then she disappeared into the elevator. And I remained, standing silently, immobilized in the memories of my body. I thought about the little boy, 8 years old. I thought about his child-molesting grandfather and I could not put the two of them inside one apartment where the only weapon of protection against endured stories of abuse was, “Sandra, Kyla promised she would watch him.” I thought about the reverberations of stories (Young, 2003). Bella was abused, her daughter was abused, and now there was a real and present possibility that the abuse would visit the next generation. As I climbed the stairs to my office, I was raging. Later in the day as I continued to think about what Bella had said and more importantly when I thought about the well being of her grandson, unstoppable movies were playing in my head. I had been safe in the tutoring classroom, me as tutor and Edith and Bella as students. We knew our positions and enacted them well. When we stepped outside of the classroom, the positioning boundary slipped and I no longer knew who I was. Also, as we walked towards the elevator, side by side, not looking at one another, it slipped again. And finally, when Bella stepped into the elevator the boundary disappeared. How, I wondered, do I hear these hard stories? And Bella’s grandson, who would ensure he was safe?

These were difficult stories to experience because they called forward stories from my early landscapes. Specifically I thought about all the times when I knew that the adults around me were aware of the chaos which lived in my home, and they chose not to intervene. I felt I had become one of those adults, one who knows and does nothing. I also thought about Bella and knew the last thing I wanted to offer up was my rage. I understood she had told me this story not because she needed a friend to express her outrage; I believed she told me the story because it was weighing heavily upon her and she wanted to share the weight with a friend.

And on another occasion when Edith came to a research conversation and wept as she spoke about the verbal abuse she endured at home, I experienced myself being temporally deposited into familiar, familial stories. Edith spoke about her husband telling her she was getting too big for her britches and as she did this, he felt she no longer needed him. She did not have to rely on him to read the mail they received or that was sent home from their daughter's school. She could easily find her way on the public transportation system. She spent hours and hours entertaining herself with her books. All of these things he experienced as his wife no longer needing him. In part, he responded to this with verbal abuse. I hated hearing these stories because Edith was my friend, a woman I cared deeply about. It outraged me that there was a man, her husband, who believed it was okay to verbally abuse my friend. I thought about how hard she was working to improve her literacies and how she knew herself, and I wanted only support for her efforts. This frustrated and angered me. Each time these feelings came forward, I recalled Dr. Clandinin reminding me to consider that the stories being shared with me were not my stories. Dr. Clandinin also reminded me that Edith knew the city, the social welfare systems, and the public transit system much better than I did. If she wanted to leave her husband, she

knew where to go and what to do. Dr. Clandinin invited me to think about why Edith shared this story and who I was in the relational space as I listened.

I thought deeply about my own fragilities and the stories Edith and Bella shared which drew my memories and my ways of knowing forward. I also thought about Edith and Bella coming back each day to the university, sitting on the bench, waiting for me to appear. Some days I saw Edith helping Bella with her card deck of phonemes or them working together on their ever-growing vocabulary decks. When I thought of them on the bench, working together, or I thought of the three of us in the classroom, reading at the table or the women at the board writing, I experienced deep feelings of satisfaction because I knew myself as a member of a community. When I thought about my membership in relation to the endured hard stories the women were sharing, I understood that in the relational space between I wanted to be a listener. Moreover, I understand the significance of good listening. I reflected upon some of the endured hard stories I shared with Dr. Clandinin and I knew deep listening was a reciprocal gift because the story teller put trust in the foreground and the listener accepted the trust and in return offered the silence of non-judgemental listening. I knew this exchange as deeply meaningful.

Chapter 7: Spinning Jean's Kaleidoscope A Metaphor for Experiencing Uniqueness

Before beginning this chapter, I remind myself that “no group this small can be used to prove any generalizations, but attention to them can provide takeoff points for reflection. First and foremost [Edith and Bella] can teach me because they are so much like me” (Bateson, 2000, p. 227).

During years two, three and four of my studies, I met each Tuesday morning at 9:00 with Dr. Clandinin. I liked to be early. I have a key for the centre, therefore I let myself in, arranged my things and sat quietly and waited. On the circular desk, there is an array of artifacts. Most are gifts given to Jean. There is one artifact I play with every week, before Jean arrives. Visually and tactilely it is a thing of beauty. It is approximately 25 centimetres in length. It consists of two main bits. One bit is the shape and size of a cardboard roll found inside paper towels. It is gold in colour and made from metal; the metal is twisted, similar to the cardboard roll. This bit sits on two, tiny, ornamental, brass legs. Attached to one end of the golden, twisted roll are two multicoloured and multi-textured glass circles and on the other end there is a glass spy hole. When I lift it up and carefully place it before my right eye, I experience pleasure and tension. First, I spin the outer circle and the shapes remain the same, however; the colours shift. When I spin the inner circle, the shapes change rapidly and when both circles spin (my favourite thing to do), the colours and shapes dance before my eye. Not quite finished, yet alert to the sound of the elevator, which will carry Jean to our meeting, I point the kaleidoscope in the direction of the sunlight and spin both circles as hard as I dare. It happens quickly, and lasts a short while; nevertheless I see bright lights dancing and shapes shifting. I enjoy the experience. I hear the elevator bell, put the toy down and wait. When I play with the kaleidoscope I also experience

tension because I never know if I should hold it up to my naked, visually impaired eye, or leave my glasses on and risk scratching the lens. I know each way will result in a different experience.

Over the three years I have grown increasingly more appreciative of the kaleidoscope because I have come to know it as a metaphor. Bateson (2000) posited if researchers experience their work in ways which “are interwoven and recursive [they might be able] to incite new metaphors” (p. 247). Thinking about the narrative threads which emerged when I laid the accounts alongside and thinking about Jean’s spinning kaleidoscope, I know it as a metaphor for that which I have come to understand because the spinning “emphasizes the way lives mesh” (p. 246). Moreover, I know the spinning kaleidoscope as symbolic of narrative conceptualizations of experience (Dewey, 1938).

The ‘meshing’ of lives was not something I considered. I arrived at the University of Alberta in the fall of 2007. At that time I knew myself and named myself, that is (my personal practical knowledge) (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988), as a skilled tutor, one who knew how to teach students who struggled with literacies. As time and experiences happened, I became less sure of what I knew and who I was. As I told, inquired into, retold and relived my stories to live by my ontological understandings shifted such that increasingly I appreciated the complex kaleidoscopic, narrative conceptualizations of stories, relationships and human struggles for what Carr (1986) named as narrative coherence and described as “... a need imposed on us whether we seek it or not. Things need to make sense. We feel the lack of when it goes missing” (p. 97). What once was a dichotomous ontological knowing, a Cartesian dualism of either or, gave way to multiple and fluid ways of knowing and being in the world which are context dependent and understood narratively. Hence, I am tenuous as I begin this chapter because metaphorically I know the world through Jean’s kaleidoscope. I wonder, therefore what precisely can I and do I

know and who am I and who might I become. With these tensions, these uncertainties I want a way forward. I remind myself of Dr. Clandinin's repeated invitation to join a larger research conversation about the intersections of literacies and identities. Simultaneously I flood myself with memories of Edith and Bella and I know their stories, our stories, theory and literature will make a contribution to the research conversation. Whelan (1999) wrote "I have lived these stories and I know their worth" (p. 31). Clinging to a similar knowing, I continue.

Re-Reading for Narrative Threads

I repeatedly re-read the first six chapters and the field texts. Having done this, I re-read only the narrative accounts; I laid the stories alongside. I shared the narrative accounts with my writing team and invited their response. I also shared them with Jean. I did this in my efforts to attend to narrative threads (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and to contextualize "the work both socially and theoretically" (p. 135). I was reading and thinking in my efforts to "see resonances across the themes, topics, underlying metaphors [such that the narrative accounts] created an imaginative space in which we, as readers, can participate in a kind of dialogue with, and across" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 323) the accounts. Through these ongoing processes and through time, I also held Jean's kaleidoscope in my mind, wondering what I could know and experience. The purpose of this chapter then is to pull forward references to and reminders of the stories you read in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 in my efforts to write about the four narrative threads which emerged for me. In the pages which follow you will read these references pulled forward and embedded with, and woven into the scholarly, theoretical literature which has grounded my understandings. I begin by reminding myself of Greene (1995) when she wrote

Perception always takes place from a particular vantage point in the lived world- since our efforts to grasp reality must, therefore, always be incomplete projects- we feel

ourselves summonsed to take the kinds of initiatives that relate perspectives into a more or less coherent, even if unfinished whole... What seems crucial is the noticing, the active insertion of one's perception into the lived world. (p. 74)

Four Narrative Threads

With Jean's kaleidoscope as a metaphor for that which I can see, know, experience, and attend to⁸⁷ (Bateson, 1994) and with Greene's (1995) reminders about perception I begin.

Holding the kaleidoscope gently before my naked eye I want the unique experience of spinning both dials; however, I do not because I am mindful of what Bateson (2000) wrote when she said:

Wisdom comes not by accumulation of more and more experiences but through discerning pattern in the deeper mystery of what is already there... Wisdom, then, is born of the overlapping of lives, the resonance between stories. (pp. 242-243)

Mindful of Bateson's suggestion, I limit myself to a single spin with my naked eye and I understand by laying our stories alongside and by pulling forward the importance of resonances across stories, there are affordances. In particular the resonances afforded us new stories, which became part of the stories we lived, told and retold in our efforts to shift our identities in the midst of our complex lives. This was the case because as we lived alongside we attended to one another, as friends do, and as a result we were better able to "understand from within each individual's storied vantage point" (Clandinin, 2007, p.324). By laying our narratives side by side I became attentive to how each of us was experiencing our living through temporal unfolding and through the ongoing foregrounding of the relational. Into this relational space, we tentatively, tried out, experienced, new stories to live by.

⁸⁷ Bateson (1994) wrote, "to attend means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience. It means to take care of... Surely there is a powerful link between presence and care. The willingness to do what needs to be done is rooted in attention to what is" (p. 109).

With my anticipation for the spinning of both dials increasing, I proceed. As shapes and colours intersect I am mindful of a second narrative thread. Leaning into the work of Connelly and Clandinin (1999) the second thread which emerged occurred at the intersections of knowledge and context. Having narratively conceptualized knowledge and context (personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscapes), Connelly and Clandinin coined the phrase ‘stories to live by’ (p. 4) in their efforts to narratively conceive the intersections of knowledge and context. At these intersections, stories to live by, in particular with respect to this study, the stories of our ongoing struggles to shift our identities are shaped and re-shaped. Moreover, the intersections of knowledge and context were places we experienced tension. Having read Clandinin et al. (2006) I understood that as our alongside relationships (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) developed, the tension which we experienced in the intersections could also be places where we co-composed traction⁸⁸ stories. These traction stories became part of the stories we lived and told in our efforts to relive our stories to live by.

Returning to the kaleidoscope and spinning only the textured dial, a third narrative thread emerges. The third thread is grounded in Greene’s (1995) ideas about the importance of inquiring into early, pre-reflective, primordial landscapes. We do this Greene argues in our efforts to ground our early stories; to know ourselves in a process of continual rediscovery; and in our efforts to “configure what lies around [as] we bring patterns and structures into existence in the landscape” (p. 73). In so doing, Greene argues we “become far more present to our enmeshed and open-ended selves” (p. 73). During the initial research conversations Edith and

⁸⁸ Tract from Latin tractus: a drawing out. I have come to know and name a traction story as follows. I like the idea of a story drawing out (tract), particularly within the context of an ongoing struggle to shift identities. I know this struggle to be demanding, recursive and context dependent. Therefore the idea of a traction story, which draws forward, creating momentum, joining other experiences, in efforts to shift an identity story is, I believe, a powerful story.

Bella told hard, endured stories from their early landscapes. Some of the stories they remembered, others they heard at family gatherings and still others had been shared with them by family, friends and health care professionals. As we began the tutoring and as our relationships developed, each of us came into moments when, in efforts to shift our stories to live by, we had first to reflect upon our early landscapes. This was a necessary part of our struggle to retell early mis-educative (Dewey, 1938) stories. Our visits to these early landscapes became traction stories in our efforts to shift our identities.

Finally, I pick-up the kaleidoscope and hold it to the sundrenched window and the fourth narrative thread becomes visible. This thread is linked to the importance of place in our efforts to be recognized, storied into, and seen as one who belongs within a certain place. Our efforts to story ourselves into place were part of our ongoing struggles to shift our identities. In the following section, each of the narrative threads will be analyzed and interpreted.

Narrative Resonances Across The Accounts

When I read each narrative account as a single, standalone entity I am mindful of a number of important issues and insights. When I read them as a set I am aware of resonances across the accounts. This affords me the opportunity to “create an imaginative space in which ... a kind of dialogue with, and across” (Clandinin, 2007, p. 323) the accounts is possible. And while there are significant differences among the accounts:

when you let your lives touch [as Edith, Bella and I have done] and make the effort of asking questions and listening to the stories they tell, you discover the intricate patterns of their differences and, at the same time, the underlying themes that all members of our species have in common. (Bateson, 2000, p. 5)

Three Individual Narrative Accounts and the Accounts as a Set

The three narrative accounts tell told stories from earlier landscapes and they tell stories of our shared, lived experiences from the tutoring and follow-up research conversations. In Edith's narrative account the reader comes to know a woman, who believed she was academically capable, however; she was embedded within home and school plotlines which knew her as otherwise. In Bella's account you encounter a woman, and her family, who have endured hard stories over the course of their lives. And in my account you meet a child and then a woman, who, attempted to "escape from childhood, an old life, indeed, an old secret life of suffering and shame" (Bruner, 2004, p. 705) by erecting a non-permeable, metaphorical divide between then and now, in my efforts to be safe. When the narrative accounts are read as a set, however, other ways of knowing are afforded. Reading them as a set I am attentive to the importance of the relational in efforts to shift identities. Reading the set the reader comes to know how each of us not only experienced our stories to live by, but also knew them as more educative when nested within supportive communities which foreground the relational.

The First Narrative Thread: Spinning the Accounts Together

Edith told many hard endured stories from her early school and home landscapes. She also told stories, which she experienced as otherwise (Bateson, 2000). In these stories of otherwise, the relational, consideration for the well being of another was foregrounded. For example, Bella told stories of how her classmates in the special education class would pick on her, reminding her she could not return home because her parents did not want her. This same group of students, when outside of the protection of their special education classroom, knew they were easy targets for bullying, by students in regular classes. Edith and her classmates understood the importance of the relational, understood they were safer in a pack and therefore remained together. “We stuck together, we were a group. It was so hard when they got us” (research conversation, October, 2010). Moreover, on the early school landscape Edith knew the woman, who was her teacher for the years she was in a special education, elementary class, as kind and thoughtful. “She was nice; I liked her. She did stuff to make us feel good”, (research conversation, October, 2011). From the comments on Edith’s final report card, it is evident the woman appreciated Edith and what she brought to the class: “Edith you have done well this year. I’ll certainly miss your good sense and helping hand next year. I wish you all the best” (Edith’s final elementary report card, n.d.). The relationship Edith had with her special education teacher was educative (Dewey, 1938). In part it allowed Edith to know school as a landscape where educative relationships were possible. Also, Edith’s relationship with her teacher helped her keep alive a knowing she had about herself; she always believed she was academically capable because she understood everything, however, she could not read. “The teacher I had in elementary school, she was good; she knew I could do the work if someone read it to me. I had one friend and she read and I said the answers and then we would write it down. Together we

could do it, her reading and my comprehension” (research conversation, November, 2009).

Moreover, Edith learned about the safety inherent when a group relation forms. Finally, in the stories we shared through the tutoring, particularly the journal stories, Edith used the pages of her journal and my response letters to her as a relational place where she could work out her frustration with writing. She was able to do these things because they were grounded in our developing relationship, a place where Edith felt respected and trusted.

Dear Diary, I know it's been 3 weeks since my last entry, but my thoughts are inportent to write in my Journal. I know Sandra likes to read what I am about. I know I can write her anything and she will write it back to me. (Edith's journal, January 2010)

I believe Edith was able to do these things as our relationship developed, such that over time, she increasingly knew herself and named herself as a writer. Furthermore, she felt gradually more comfortable to express a range of feelings, knowing I would be reading. As Edith progressively trusted our relationship, she trusted the spaces between our journal conversations, such that this space became a place to try on identities. By this I mean, she was beginning to know herself as a writer.

I wanted to say I like the letter Sandra wrote to me. The letter ment all to me. I know Sandra can understand my sayings. I have to get more conference in myself. I have to stop saiding that I cannot do thing and try my very best work. I can do it. (Edith's journal, January 2010)

Edith was delighted to know I could read and understand what she had written. By foregrounding the relational we created a space where she experienced herself as a writer; a writer who could be understood and responded to by another writer. These experiences became traction stories in Edith's struggles to shift her identities.

Spinning Bella into the Accounts

Bella's hard, endured stories of school and home were longitudinal and generational in that she told these stories of herself, her children and her grandson. These stories contributed to Bella knowing teachers as persons who could not be trusted, persons who could injure a child and persons who would not provide her and family members with the education they required:

I have bad memories from Grade 2. We had this teacher and she was really strict. If you made a mistake, she had a ruler and she would smack your fingers. When you were writing something, she would stand over you and stare. If she saw you had written one word wrong, she would take the ruler and hit your hand. (research conversation, November, 17, 2009)

When we began tutoring I was asleep to the depth of Bella's distrust of teachers and school. Moreover, I was asleep to how it was being drawn forward into the tutoring. I was focussed on delivering my lesson plans. Before waking up to Bella's stories of school and teachers, my lesson plans reflected my personal practical knowledge as it related to the teaching of students with learning disabilities. Reading the accounts I understand my personal practical knowledge "... had become so habitual that [it] ... became recipes for structuring experiences itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but directing it into the future" (Bruner, 2004, p. 708).

In laying our accounts side by side and thinking deeply about Edith's meaningful relationship with her special education teacher and her working through some of her frustrations around journal writing by foregrounding the relational allowed me to wakeup and see how very hard Bella worked to live, tell and retell a story that included her engaging with multisensory reading and writing instruction, including using her hand as a tool for spelling and syllabication.

Zinnesser, (1987) when describing Dillard's memoir writing (*An American Childhood*, 1987) said she was "... placing her lively Pittsburgh childhood in the larger frame of the American landscape" (22). In this same paper, when describing her memoir, Dillard said it is "... about waking up- about what it feels like to notice that you're been set down in a going world" (p. 22). From this I understand I was in a process of waking up to Bella and to myself in the 'going on', temporal, narratively composed world of our classroom and waking up to our efforts to shift our identities. Moreover, I understand in the moments when Bella did use her hand consistently, she knew me, her teacher, as trustworthy, as someone who believed in her and knew her as capable and therefore was pushing her. She also knew these moments as traction stories in her efforts to shift her identities and know herself as clever.

The more you pushed, the madder I was. I tried to leave but I thought about you pushing so hard. I thought if she can push that hard and she is that smart, she must really believe I can do it. If she can believe in me and she can see something in me, then I have to believe that I can do it if I am just pushed hard enough because I knew you cared about me. The more you pushed the more I believed in me. (research conversation February 3, 2011)

Bella had a long and well developed plotline of distrust towards teachers and schools. When I asked her to use her hand, I joined the teachers from school landscapes, who could not be trusted. Over time, however, as we came to know and trust the relational space, Bella was able to experience my request that she use her hand as a vote of confidence in her abilities. In turn she experienced a story which she later told as a traction story in her efforts to shift her identities and know herself as clever.

Spinning Sandra into the Narrative:

From the outset of the research journey I lacked confidence in my ability to engage in what Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to as an alongside relationship. I understood what this meant based on my readings and based on the experiences I was having with Jean, through our weekly meetings. In part, meeting with Jean every week made the imagined task of an alongside relationship seem impossible. As my candidacy date grew closer it occurred to me I ought to begin a process, whereby I studied Jean because I understood she was consistently an exemplar of alongside. I began to take mental notes and store them away for the future, when my ‘imagined up’ participants would be living and breathing, complex women that I would be in relation with. I was as Coles (1997) noted attempting to “... take stock of others [Jean], while also try[ing] to live [my] own [life] with some self-respect” (p. 49). On occasion I came into moments of tension with Jean and as a result I began to understand that, ontologically I was not simply on the receiving end of an alongside relationship; I was also writing myself into it. As Dillard (1987) noted, “... when you, you notice that you’re here” (p. 146). Coles (1989) said, “supervision is after all a meeting of two persons, a shared possibility for each of them” (p. 8). Understanding I was shaping our alongside relationship sharpened my appreciation of the importance of attending to the relational. By reading the three accounts as a set I am more attentive to the importance of the relational, not just as a concern I had at the outset, but also as a thread which was woven through each of our journeys. We struggled to draw forward this thread in the most tension-filled moments because we knew educative relational stories would carry us through the places where our ways of knowing bumped up against (Clandinin et al. 2006) each others’. We also knew the relational between spaces, as spaces where we could try out future stories in efforts to shift our identities.

At the outset of the study I was nervous, however, I donned and embodied the familiar identity thread of expert tutor and ploughed ahead in the tutoring. Through the ploughing I became what De Marco Torgovnik (1994) described as a “stern arbiter of conduct” (p. 5): mine, Edith and Bella’s. I might have continued this way through six months of tutoring had it not been for the research conversations and the three times per week, when I sat in my apartment and listened to our tutoring sessions. In the research conversations and while tutoring, Edith and Bella were telling me things, asking me to attend, offering me clues and occasionally demanding that I attend to the relational. In the research conversations when they told hard endured stories I ached for them and I ached for my child self, as I also endured hard stories. I also regularly experienced white hot anger. For days I carried around images and moving pictures of the three of us as little girls and the hard stories we endured. Regardless of my efforts I could not story narrative coherence into these stories. Carr (1986) wrote “life can be regarded as a constant effort, even a struggle to maintain or restore narrative coherence in the face of ever-threatening, impending chaos at all levels” (p. 91). I could not tolerate knowing I was contributing more hard stories and this is what I often heard when I listened to the digital recordings of the tutoring sessions. I needed and wanted to shift my personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) such that it accounted for who I was being in the space between and who my being afforded in terms of the identity stories Edith, Bella and I were struggling to compose. By reading Edith’s account and listening to her struggle to know herself as a writer within the context of our journal relationship I am able to discern how the relational is highlighted in this struggle. When I add Bella’s account I again hear the loud clanging of the importance of the relational as Bella struggled to know herself as clever. Finally, this set of accounts, read as one, draws my attention to my struggles to know and name myself as capable of coming alongside. In

summary then, these three accounts read as a set highlight the importance of the relational as one struggles to compose future educative stories.

The Second Narrative Thread: Struggles to Shift Our Stories to Live By

With both dials spinning I see shapes and colours intersect and the second narrative thread is visible. Having narratively conceptualized knowledge and context (personal practical knowledge and professional knowledge landscapes), Connelly and Clandinin (1999) coined the phrase ‘stories to live by’ (p. 4) in their efforts to narratively conceive of the intersections of knowledge and context. At these intersections, our stories to live by, our ongoing struggles to shift our identities, were shaped and re-shaped. Each of us began the study wanting to shift our identities. Edith and Bella self identified as wanting to improve their literacies. When asked on the first day of the study “Why they wanted to participate and what they expected to learn?”

Edith replied:

I hope to butter myself.

I hope to help my daughter and students.

I like to help Sandra in her studies.

I like to be butter in very day live. (personal communication, November 2009)

When asked the same question Bella replied:

I want learn more about myself How I am Learn.

I want get bet in my school work.

I want to learn ways to make it stay in my head more. (personal communication, November, 2009)

And had I asked myself to answer a similar question I would have replied:

I want to learn to be in relationship such that I am not regularly concerned that my actions will result in the other person deciding to fracture the relationship. De Marco Torgovnick (1994) wrote “keep it unspoken and it may not happen.... Memoir is saying it out loud. It contradicts the rules of silence” (pp. 177-178). I had tried for years to silently rid myself of this concern; I was unsuccessful.

Today I understand each of the answers to the question, “*Why they wanted to participate and what they expected to learn?*” as issues of identity within narrative conceptualizations of identities and identity shifts. Beginning with the notion of humans as story-telling creatures (Heilbrun, 1988; McAdams, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) who live and tell stories as they struggle to compose narrative coherence (Carr, 1986) into their stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) I understand Edith, Bella, and I were engaged in struggles at the places where our knowledge came into tension with context.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) wrote “we became fascinated with trying to understand teachers as knowers: knowers of themselves, of their situations, of children, of subjects, of teaching, of learning” (p. 1). In their efforts to conceptualize teachers as knowledgeable they thought about the experiences teachers have: past, present and future. They coined the term ‘personal practical knowledge’ to describe how teachers “reconstruct the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 25). Over time they saw this knowledge as a storied, narrative knowledge. They also understood “that knowledge was both formed and expressed in contexts” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 4, 1995). From this understanding they coined the term professional knowledge landscape which they argued is “composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places and things” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5). With these two narrative

conceptualizations in place Clandinin and Connelly sought to narratively link knowledge, context and identity and hence the term ‘stories to live by’. Stories to live by then “refer[s] to identity, [and is]... given meaning by the narrative understandings of knowledge and context” (1999, p.4).

Bella, Edith and I began the study together. Each of us had uniquely different narrative life histories, which “reflected a person’s life history- and social – reflecting the milieu, the contexts in which we lived” (Connelly and Clandinin, 1995, p. 5). Our temporal, storied knowledge landscapes were composed “of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places and things” (p. 5). Moreover, our life stories, our experiences “grew out of other experiences, and experiences lead to further experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). It was into this complex continuity that an enmeshed set of stories to live by sought to shift, such that we would “generate a new relation between a human being and her environment-her life, community, world” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2006, p. 39). It was the relived stories that each of us was eager for. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) wrote, “although it may be difficult to retell, and therefore, write one’s life, it is significantly more difficult to relive, to live out the new person” (p. 476). It was at the intersections of knowledge and context that we experienced spaces where we could tentatively try out traction stories as part of our ongoing struggles to shift our identities. In the section which follows I will pull forward references to and reminders of the stories you read in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 which illuminate these struggles.

For me, one of the most significant tutoring experiences occurred on February 11, 2010. I have come to know this moment as a traction story. I like the idea of a story drawing forward, particularly within the context of an ongoing struggle to shift identities. On February 11, 2010,

Bella and I were in the midst of co-composing a traction story at the place where context and knowledge intersected.

Bella was at the board. I asked her to write a sentence which included one of the vocabulary words we were working on. She wrote six words and then stood back, just as I had instructed her to do. She proceeded slowly, she read the words softly to herself and she used her hand in efforts to match sound to symbol. Each time she wrote a new version of the sentence it improved, such that through four iterations, I was, increasingly, able to decode what she had written. Initially, when I attempted to read her sentence, my reaction was to verbalize the process I wanted Bella to follow. I did not do this because during a research conversation (February, 3, 2010) Bella poignantly described her discomfort in using her hand as an aid for spelling and decoding.

Well to me, I feel like I'm a retarded person, like you know? I just – I'm the kind of person that doesn't like, want to look bad, I'm not saying that I want to look smart, but I don't want to look stupid either. Using my hands I feel like it, I feel like it feels stupid or retarded, just it makes me feel so uncomfortable, and it's like, and it's like sticking me in a room with a bunch of ten men that are just like gross, and I just feel so uncomfortable so I just want to get out of there, right? (research conversation, February, 3, 2010)

This story was hard to hear because I understood in asking Bella to use her hand, I was causing her to experience acute discomfort. Heilbrun (1989) wrote about women speaking profoundly to one another. I understood Bella's analogy of using her hand to being in a room filled with men was her speaking profoundly to me. I was not completely able to understand the temporality of her knowing or precisely how it was being drawn forward into tutoring, however, Bella's words were enough; I decided to stop asking/insisting. This was a decision not grounded

in my personal practical knowledge (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988) of the best pedagogies to engage when instructing students with language-based difficulties. Rather, it was a decision grounded in my desire to foreground the relational. Bella is my friend and I did not want to harm her and I understood I was. It was grounded in my desire to see Bella big (Greene, 1995) and therefore “resist viewing [Bella] ... as [a] mere object or chess piece and view [her] in [her] integrity and particularity instead” (p. 10). And in my silence, and much to my surprise, Bella proceeded in a way which mirrored my personal practical knowledge. Within the context of the moment and within the context of our developing alongside relationship Bella and I created a traction story which helped us know ourselves as otherwise (Bateson, 2000), because it helped us shift our identity stories and because it helped us know our lives as a process of becoming (Greene, 1995).

Separately we knew the world differently. I was determined to insist Bella use her hand; she knew her compliance to this demand/request would result in acute discomfort. This tension, however, was experienced within the context of our developing alongside relationship. Within this context, I knew to remain silent in my efforts to be cognizant of who I was. I wanted to be supportive of Bella; I wanted to be worthy of her trust and friendship. Into this relational context, Bella did things which she had told me caused her to experience acute discomfort: used her hand, stood back, sub-vocalized and corrected. She did these things in response to a request made by me and she did them within the context of our developing relationship. She wrote a magnificent, almost error free sentence and more importantly, she knew this experience as a traction story in her efforts to know and name herself as clever.

Later when Bella commented on this experience she said:

When you said, Bella, you got it, you are doing really well. I thought I am so normal, I got it. I can walk and be like other people. For that second it just felt so good...Sandra what you gave to me I can't be bitter. What you gave to me a little bit of a light, I can do it. If I can do it, why should I be bitter? (research conversation February, 2011)

From this I understand what we know is indeed dependent on the context or contexts (physical and temporal) embedded in the experience. Based on my extensive training, I knew to jump in, to redirect in efforts to increase the number of successful literacy experiences Bella had. My urge to jump in was based on what Craig (1999) described as “a sacred theory-practice story whose theory-driven plot line shapes the landscape that educators come to know” (p. 151). Bella knew to balk at requests/demands from teachers that resulted in her experiencing discomfort. These two ways of knowing bumped up against (Clandinin et al., 2006) each other within the context of our developing relationship and something otherwise (Bateson, 2000) occurred. I remained silent and Bella wrote a magnificent sentence. I remained silent because I had come to understand the stories I lived whilst a student at the Academy of Orton-Gillingham Practitioners and Educators (AOGPE) and the stories my AOGPE teachers imagined and which they taught to me (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999), were inappropriate to the context of the story Bella and I were in the midst of co-composing. I knew the AOGPE story was inappropriate, and I knew putting it aside put me in conflict with the ongoing professional development which I regularly engaged through the electronic conduit of the Academy. I understand this moment and the tension as a border. Connelly and Clandinin (1999) posited “borders mark the dividing places. Borders say that something different is about to begin” (p. 104). Bella and I each have unique personal practical knowledge. Within the context of this story (past, present and future), our ways of knowing came into tension, such that borders marked what we knew and what we might know.

The border demarcation was also shaped by temporality as we were both drawing forward knowing based on past experiences. Yet the border was also embedded within the context of a developing alongside relationship. This afforded Bella and me to be otherwise, to live and co-compose our stories to live by in educative ways (Dewey, 1938). We were trying to create new stories by “rethinking and extending [our] stories to live by with respect to” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 96) our personal practical knowledge and within the context of our relationship.

This storied experience is now part of how I know myself as an educator. I know myself desiring to, and capable of wading into the relational space. And in that moment, Bella knew herself as normal. This story also serves to remind me that our efforts (Bella’s and mine) “to story tell, to be in relationship, and to reflect upon actions taken and things thought” (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995) were ongoing and part of our efforts to relive our stories to live by. One traction story, thick, rich and educative (Dewey 1938) and therefore our efforts to shift our identities, to write our lives (Heilbrun, 1989) were dragged forward in the midst of our ongoing struggles.

A second story which foregrounds the intersections of knowledge and context is drawn forward from a story Edith and I experienced as we lived alongside one another through six months of tutoring and as we woke up to each other’s stories to live by (Clandinin, 2007). By listening to the recordings of our research conversations on a number of occasions, there were affordances. Listening and experiencing through the narrative inquiry three dimensional space has allowed me to consider “the complexity, the multiplicity, and the reflexive nature of our lives” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 114). When I heard Edith’s voice and experienced the stories she was sharing, I shifted through contexts, backward and forwards in time and I travelled with

Edith as she shared her feelings. When Edith brought the camera to my office to share the photographs she had taken as a result of my request that she show me, with pictures, what it means to live with literacies less than she desired, we had known each other for six months. Through this time and as we shared experiences, I had come to deeply respect Edith and her ongoing, never ending efforts to know and name herself as literate. I had not, however, given my attention over to knowing Edith as a mother. When she brought the photographs and when I downloaded them onto my computer, I was silent as I listened to Edith tell stories. And later when I asked Edith to select six photographs which she believed best illustrated the stories of her struggles with literacies, I noted that five of the pictures included stories about her daughter.

As Edith pointed to the picture and shared her stories I understood “visual narrative inquiry combines the use of storytelling with photographs to express life experiences” (Bach, 2006, p. 289). Life experiences which, to date, I had been asleep to. Edith’s photographs, alongside her stories, “altered and enlarge[d] [my]... notions of what is worth looking at” (Sontag, 1977, p. 3). As I listened, looked, experienced, I woke up to Edith, the mother of Martina. When describing the sign picture, Edith said:

I can read the signs to my daughter and I do. I am Martina’s teacher. When we are out, I show her things, I point them out to her, I teach her so she can be independent. She can do lots of things, if you give her a chance and support her at the beginning. I know what it is like to feel sheltered because of limited literacies; the way you feel about yourself is not good. I do not want these feelings for Martina. (research conversation, May, 2010)

In reference to the photograph of the tiny mural painted on the side of an electrical box, she said:

I know I am growing and I know I am sharing my growing with Martina and this makes me very happy and proud. From the day I found out I was pregnant I wanted to be a good mother. I wanted to be all the things for my child, which my mother never was. (research conversation, May, 2010)

When describing the picture of the large shoes she said:

When my child came along, I knew I had to always be one step ahead of her. I realized I had very big shoes to fill, like the shoes in the picture. I wanted to be a good parent to my child and I knew this included being able to read. (research conversation, May, 2010)

Edith shared these photographs and the accompanying stories in my office. This was a place where we both felt comfortable. Here “our relationship became a more reciprocal one in that we shared stories and could better support one another” (Hollingsworth, 1994, p. 137). This was the case because over the months we had created a rhythm to the conversations, one which we most often followed. Edith would arrive and we would begin our conversation. About 45 minutes in, we would take a break by walking over to the coffee shop and purchasing a drink. Upon our return we would continue for another hour or so. It was in the physical space of my office, two chairs and a small table, no white board or any class work to be done, that we chatted. It was also into the context of our developing relationship that Edith shared the pictures and her stories of them. In this space we knew ourselves more as friends, because the tutoring did not occur in this room and because we had both shared hard endured stories of our lives. We knew each other as trustworthy and we knew the space as non-hierarchal.

It was in this space (physical and relational) where I began to wake up to Edith’s complex stories of herself as mother. This was important for me to wake-up to because it deepened my understandings of Edith’s struggles to shift her identities. Moreover, knowing Edith as a mother,

struggling with a daughter, allowed me to experience her and the common narratives (Bateson, 2000) we were living out. Bateson wrote, “the strangeness of others is most off-putting when it is experienced as static, most approachable when it is set within a narrative of continuing development” (p. 5). As our relationship developed and as we knew each other in different contexts (physical and relational) I experienced myself drawing Edith nearer and knowing and naming our friendship as something I increasingly valued. I was able to “look newly and clearly not only at [myself] but also at another, finding not only strength but also variety” (Bateson, p. 8).

A Third Narrative Thread: The Importance of Inquiring into Early, Pre-reflective, Primordial Landscapes

Returning to the kaleidoscope and spinning the textured dial, the third narrative thread is visible. The third thread is grounded in Greene’s (1995) ideas about the importance of inquiring into early, pre-reflective, primordial landscapes. Greene posited “on the original landscape where an individual is grounded, where her or his life began, there is always a sense of consciousness being opened to the common” (p. 75). We must visit these original landscapes Greene argues, in our efforts to ground our early stories; to know ourselves in a process of continual rediscovery; and in our efforts to “configure what lies around [as] we see patterns amid structures into existence in the landscape” (p. 73). In so doing, Greene argues, we “become far more present to our enmeshed and open-ended selves (p. 73).

During research conversations Edith and Bella told hard, endured stories from their early landscapes. Some of the stories they remembered, others they heard at family gatherings and still others had been shared by friends and health care professionals. In telling these stories, they had “shaped the materials of lived experience into narrative[s and had come to know this] to be a

source of meaning making” (Greene, 1995, p. 75). As we began the tutoring and as our relationships developed, we experienced tension when the narratives we had constructed no longer served as we struggled to compose stories to shift and relive (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) our stories to live by. Merleau Ponty (1964) wrote, “a route, an experience which gradually clarifies itself, which gradually rectifies itself and proceeds by dialogue with itself and with others” (p. 21). As Bella, Edith and I struggled to shift our identities, and as our relationships developed, possible routes emerged and influenced the experiences we were having.

We began the study wanting to name and know ourselves as otherwise. As was noted above, Edith wanted to name herself as a capable student, a belief she had as a young child, however, because of the many and varied landscapes she lived upon, she was not afforded experiences which would have allowed this story to develop. I wanted to name and know myself as capable of alongside relationship, capable of flourishing within a community.

Greene (1995) argued, “from the vantage point of a situated consciousness, perspectives are opening up, vistas are appearing, shapes-yes and shadows too-are making themselves visible” (pp. 75-76). As our alongside relationships developed, these vantage points appeared and afforded us opportunities to know and name our early, endured hard stories in educative ways. For example, when we read book one of Kit Pearson’s *The Guests of War Trilogies* (1998) Edith was afforded an opportunity to think anew about her move from her parents’ home to her grandparents’ home. This was the case because she read about the agonizing process Gavin and Norah’s parents experienced as they struggled to decide whether or not, they should send their children to the safety of Canada as the war raged in Europe. Moreover, she read about how hard Norah, the eldest child, fought against the decision. Edith said she related to Norah and how hard

it must have been for her to be sent away. It was the act of being sent away, being forced from her home, that both Edith and Norah endured. When she read about Norah's efforts to get her parents to change their minds, Edith was deeply moved because she saw herself in Norah.

Samura (1998) noted:

What one remembers must always be reinterpreted in light of new knowledge and in the context of new experiences. What and who is remembered, then, is not some perfectly preserved fragment of experience or identity from the past but, rather, is an image that is newly understood and resymbolized in the present. (p. 210)

It was this reading, this reflection on her early landscapes which allowed Edith to report to me:

My life was a big sorrow. If the teachers put this in (Edith was referring to multi-sensory, direct instruction) to their knowing back there and back then, I wouldn't feel so bad. I can't change it. I am still there; I can't shift from those sorrows. My shifting is through reading books. My crying when I understand a book. My laughter when I read and understand that is my happiness, my shift. (research conversation, September, 2010)

By visiting her early landscapes, Edith was able to relate to the character Norah. Lugones (1987) described loving playful attitudes as attitudes which "carry us through the activity" (p. 16). As Edith read she was travelled temporally to her early landscapes. She did this within our developing alongside relationship. A place where she knew herself and me as

not self-important, we are not fixed in particular constructions of ourselves, which is part of saying that we are open to self-construction. We may not have rules, and when we do have rules, there are no rules that are to us sacred. We are not worried about competence.

We are not wedded to a particular way of doing things. While playful we have not abandoned ourselves to, nor are we stuck in, any particular “world”. We are there creatively. (p.16)

Edith’s playful construction of the character of Norah allowed her to know and name herself as literate because she read, understood and related to the text. In travelling to Norah’s world and in getting to know her, she also came to know herself differently. Greene wrote about this connecting of past experiences to present reading when she said:

meanings derived from previous experiences often find their way through the gateway of the imagination to interact with present-day experiences. When aspects of the present are infused by materials originating in the past, there is always a re-viewing of the past. (p. 76)

As Edith was experiencing a deep connection to Norah, she was also afforded an opportunity to know herself and name herself as literate. Being alongside Edith through this I was afforded an opportunity to reflect upon my high school experiences of reading American author Pat Conroy. “Looking back, I find myself seeing past experiences in new ways- and I realize what it means to say that I have lived one possible life among many” (Greene, 1995, p. 77). In Conroy’s book, *The Great Santini*, I imagined myself into the life of the protagonist Ben, as he struggled to grow into adulthood alongside an alcoholic father. Reading this novel I understood some of my struggles with my own father and I understood a love-hate relationship with an alcoholic parent was possible. As I observed Edith engage with Norah in ways which I named educative, I was able to “restore visibility to the shapes of [some of my] primordial, perceived landscape[s]” (p. 77) and, in so doing, appreciate there were indeed many moments when I went to great lengths in my efforts to love my father. This story continues to shape my

stories to live by as cognition increasingly slips from my father; I am glad to know he was a father I struggled to love. Moreover, it has and is allowing me to know some of my early endured dysfunction as stories which are “malleable and multifaceted, not rigid hollow shells shaping the lives of people” (Gergen, 2004, p. 274). I am grateful.

Bella was also afforded opportunities to think about what might have been as she looked back and reflected upon some of the stories from her early landscapes. Bella shared many hard stories which contributed to a plotline of distrust she developed towards schools and teachers. During a research conversation (February, 2011) Bella shared the following:

I get frustrated and mad. I get really angry because I always ask myself, what happened, what makes one person really smart so they can go to school and learn? I see people go to school and they get it and then another person can't. It was easy to blame school and the teachers. But you know, Sandra who chooses that? I did not want to believe it was me, because that is a real hard thing to look at.

From this I understand Bella was reflecting on her plotline of schools and teachers as untrustworthy. She was asking herself some difficult questions and, in so doing, began to consider the possibility that schools and teachers were not the only reasons for her difficulties. In these moments she was threading the complexities of her life into how she understood where she was and how early stories and early landscapes shaped and continued to shape her efforts to compose her life.

Sunlight Makes Visible the Final Narrative Thread

I hold the kaleidoscope up to the sundrenched window and the fourth narrative thread is visible. This thread is linked to the importance of place in efforts to be recognized, storied into,

and seen as one who belongs within a certain place. Both Edith and I leaned into the narrative conceptualizations of place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) as we struggled to compose future, educative stories. Edith repeatedly situated herself at the university, with a university teacher, as part of her ongoing efforts to know herself, name herself and be a member of what Smith (1988) referred to as a member of the literacy club. Smith, while writing about learning, posited that personal perception, that is, belonging to the club is mandatory in order to learn. He wrote “if we see ourselves as members of a club, then we can’t help learning to be like members of the club (1988, p. 48). Moreover, Smith argued, “if we do not belong to a particular club, then we do not appreciate ourselves to be people who are members of that club.... We cease seeing ourselves as “that kind of people”. (p. 47)

In a research conversation (November, 2010) Edith shared the following:

We didn’t have many friends coming over to the house because we were like outcasts; we were the shunned. Other parents would not allow their children to come over to our house... It was degrading because the other students had parents who cared and ours didn’t. I was teased because of my parents. Sometimes we went to school in unwashed, dirty clothes. Sometimes we didn’t have breakfast or lunch. There were six of us children, so everyone knew about our family. The teachers knew what was going on at home; some cared, but most didn’t. There was one teacher who brought us food, but that made it worse, because the other children would point us out and say we were getting favouritism. We were teased because of our family and I was excluded because I was in the special class, but it’s all rolled into one.

From this I understood there were two clubs (Smith, 1988) which Edith was excluded from. The first club Edith was prevented from participating in was a cohort of friends. Because

of her home and family life, Edith did not develop friendships. In addition, because of her longitudinal placement in a special education class, Edith never knew herself as a member of the literate club; a club where members could read, write and comprehend with ease. Lugones (1987) wrote:

in a “world” some of the inhabitants may not understand or hold the particular construction of them that constructs them in that “world” So, they may be “worlds” that construct me in ways that I do not even understand. Or it may be that I understand the constructions, but do not hold it of myself. I may not accept it as an account of myself, a construction of myself and yet, I may be *animating* such a construction. (p. 10)

Edith wanted and continues to want to name and know herself as a member of the literate club. She struggled to compose stories where she was known as literate. In her struggles, she had come to understand the grand narrative (Lindemann Nelson, 2001) of ‘the university’; therefore, she was eager to compose stories set within the physical context of the university.

Initially I was not awake to this. Greene’s (1977)) notion of ‘wide-awakeness’ “... by the term “wide-awakeness” we want to donate a plane of consciousness of highest tension originating in an attitude of full attention to life and its requirements... This attention is an active, not a passive one” (p. 121), allowed me to attend. As Edith repeatedly named the tutoring as “my classes at the university” and as she repeatedly introduced me as “my teacher at the university” I began to ‘wakeup’. Through this I wondered what would have happened if we had conducted the tutoring in a place other than the university. How would a non-university tutoring location have shaped Edith’s efforts to story herself into a university, and in so doing, shift her identities? I also began to wakeup (Greene, 1977) to Edith’s identity making efforts to shift her stories to live by. Given the tutoring occurred at the university, Edith saw herself as a university student, she

knew herself as belonging to the university. In repeatedly naming me, to her friends at the adult literacy centre, as her teacher at the university, not only was Edith leaning into the physical place of the university: those tall buildings on the south shore of the river, she was also putting herself and me (the university teacher) in a dynamic and interactive relationship. In her journal (December, 2009) Edith wrote, “I am very happy I am going to the University for classes. I can learn alot from Sandra. I get very excide about our class. I tell everybody about them.” And as we negotiated her narrative account (June 13, 2010), Edith said:

Initially I felt honoured that someone recognized me for who I am and for the hard work I do to improve my literacies. You were not seeing me as a statistic. I thought I would never do something at a university. You have to be smart to go to university and you have to read and be good at it. In the study I was a university student and this was important because none of my siblings went to the university. I never thought of going because I did not have enough education, even though I graduated from a high school program. Being asked to come to the University for the study was the biggest gift someone ever gave me.

Tuan (2001) wrote, “space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning” (p. 136). The university was one such place for Edith. She knew the grand narrative (Lindemann Nelson, 2001) of the university. She knew it as a place where smart people go after completing high school. She knew it as the large old buildings on the south side of the river. And she knew it as a place where a literate identity was assumed, such that those who attended were members of the literate club, a membership she was desperate for. Before the study began Edith’s lived experience also resulted in her knowing the university as a place where literste people went to study therefore it was not a place where she was welcome. This knowing had a

past, it was grounded in her experiences with school and it was grounded in her identity as a woman wanting to be more literate. As Edith continually interacted with the built form (an existential condition) of the university and with me, her university teacher, also an existential condition (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006), she shared her stories of her university life with other people in her social context. Being a student at the university and sharing these lived experiences gave traction to Edith's efforts to shift her identities and know and name herself as literate. As she struggled to story herself into the grand narrative of the university I began to understand the centrality of place, the university. It also allowed me to deepen my understandings of the complexities of Edith's life. Each day she left her home, her husband and her daughter and she came to the university, where she experienced joy. The university was a place where she was learning, where she experienced joy, where she was respected and where she was engaged in meaningful relationships with women she increasingly cared for. Each day she left the university and she returned to her home context where she was known and named in other ways.

Once the study began Edith knew the university as a place where she was experiencing joy for the many things she was learning. Thus the university became a personal "center of felt value" (Tuan, 2001, p. 138) and her depth of sentiment for the place grew with each passing week. This was the case because it was at the university where Edith was cradled within and was co-composing alongside relationships, while improving her literacies. This allowed her to know and name herself as literate, a member of the club.⁸⁹ From this I understand how very important it was to Edith that the study occurred at the place of the university because the place allowed her to story herself into the grand narrative, and it was "helping her attain a strong sense of self"

⁸⁹ Earlier this month I accompanied Edith to a meeting she had arranged with an intake worker at a local college. In January of 2012, Edith is scheduled to begin her first college course as part of her dream to become a teacher's assistant.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 52) as literate; something she had struggled to do for many, many years. Basso (1996) wrote:

The experience of sensing places, then, is both reciprocal and incorrigibly dynamic. As places animate the ideas and feelings of persons who attend to them, these same ideas and feelings animate on which the attention has been bestowed, and the movements of this process- inward toward facts of self, outward toward aspects of the external world, alternatively both together- cannot be known in advance. When places are actively sensed the physical landscape becomes welded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the mind may lead is anybody's guess. (p. 55)

From all the stories Edith shared and the stories we co-composed I understood Edith was eager to weld a story of herself as university student into her stories to live by. The place of the university and me, her university teacher were part of her efforts.

Thinking about this story through the narrative inquiry three dimensional space I imagine Edith as she moved between her remembered past within specific landscapes (school and home) where many of her told stories were mis-educative, to the temporal moments of our study where she was “imaginatively constructing an identity for the future” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 55). Edith knew this imaginative struggle as hard, complex and fluid. Crites (1979) noted “for any experience, too, is an achievement of aesthetic coherence [and] experience is an imaginative construction” (p. 107). By leaning into the grand narrative of the university, Edith was struggling to compose a story which included her as a university student, therefore as one, who is capable and one who is assumed to be as successful upon the landscape. Bruner (2004) wrote:

The culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to

segment and purpose-build the very “events” of a life. In the end we become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about” our lives. (p. 694)

Edith wanted to live the story she was telling her friends, a student at the university. The university as place was a crucial element in her story because it had the power to “... shape and constrain the stories that are told or, indeed, that could be told” (Bruner, 2004, p. 703). She wanted to be, as Lugones (1987) described “at ease in a particular “world”. [Edith wanted to] know all the norms that are to be followed,... know all the words that there are to be spoken [and] know all the moves” (p. 12) such that she was a confident university student. Edith wanted to name and know the university as a “world” in which she was familiar and comfortable with.

This story also allowed me to think about my own struggles with place. As I thought about Edith and her efforts to story herself into the university I was afforded opportunities to help me think about other ways to explain my struggles with place. This was exciting because I understood it “might lead to further retelling[s]” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60).

I thought about place as I struggled to compose my stories to live by upon two, distinct landscapes. My ‘toing and froing’ between southern Ontario and the western Canadian city where I pursued my PhD followed the scheduling rhythms of the university and occasionally the demands of a family. As I moved back and forth, I was regularly mystified as I sat through the four hour plane ride. This was the case because I would get to wondering about the person I was leaving behind and the person I would soon become. Lugones (1987) noted, “those of us who are “world” - travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different ‘worlds’ and of having the capacity to remember other ‘worlds’ and ourselves in them” (p. 11). On the western landscape, I was a doctoral student and on the eastern landscape, a mother, daughter, wife, tutor and friend. I do not mean to suggest I was ever totally one without the other; rather the two

places drew forward different threads of my identities. I felt unable to draw the bits of my identities together, such that my friends and family on either landscape might know me in the fullness of who I was becoming. This inability was strengthened by the acute differences between my living on the two landscapes. On the eastern landscape, I was a homeowner, who enjoyed living in a glorious and spacious home. On the western landscape, I lived in what I came to refer to as a wee box, also known as student housing. Having visited my bachelor pad, my western friends got to calling me, Jack-in-the-box. There were also acute differences in the landforms. While I came to deeply appreciate the trips I took into the Rocky Mountains, I longed to set my eyes upon the Great Lakes and feel myself embraced by humidity. The two landscapes were also different in that in the east I had a car and in the west I had a bicycle. I came to experience my stories to live by, my identities as acutely different depending where I was. I was aware of the differences and I was searching for a way to draw them together because I experienced discomfort when friends and family did not know the me I was becoming. Lugones (1987) described the shifting as follows, “one does not pose as someone else, one does not pretend to be, for example, someone of a different personality or character or someone who uses space or language differently than the other person” (p. 11). I wanted a way to draw my stories to live by together because I knew and experienced the me I was becoming as the best possible version of self. Carr (1986) referred to this as a rupture in my narrative coherence. He argued:

Narrative coherence is what we find or effect in much of our experience and action, and to the extent that we do not, we aim for it, try to produce it, and try to restore it when it goes missing for whatever reason. (p, 90)

I was searching for a way to make sense of my life on two distinct landscapes, similar to what teachers (Huber, 1999; Whelan, 1999) described as the lack of coherence which they

experienced as they moved between in-and-out-of classroom places in the professional knowledge landscapes (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995).

In the winter of the third year of my studies, my youngest daughter came to visit and in the winter of fourth year, my eldest came. Both girls accompanied me to my weekly meeting at the CRTED. It was at these two separate meetings when I began to appreciate, it was not physical geography which was preventing my girls from knowing me on the western landscape. Rather, it was my willingness, or a lack there of, to allow my daughters to see and know me upon the places on the landscape. I also understood, having read Clandinin and Connelly (1992), that my daughters' narrative unities were composed from previous experiences and these experiences were helping the girls compose meaning as they shaped their present and future stories. Hoffman (1989) wrote "the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love" (p. 74). I understand she was referring to a specific period of time and to particular places. I knew I could do nothing to physically unite the two landscapes. However, reading Hoffman allowed me to understand I could metaphorically draw the two landscapes together by allowing my daughters to experience my identity threads as they visited me. I went to the weekly research issues meeting knowing it as an opportunity for my girls to experience their mother as: a trusted colleague, a scholar in training, a hard working doctoral student and, perhaps most importantly, as a woman committed to living alongside relationships. I wanted to co-compose moments with the girls so they were afforded opportunities to expand their narrative unities, such that they were able to experience the identities I was struggling to compose on the western landscape. I had an imagined plan and I was hopeful for an opportunity to live out the plan. Carr (1986) noted:

But the narrative coherence of a life-story is a struggle nevertheless, and a responsibility which no one else can finally lift entirely from the shoulders of the one who lives that

life. It is struggle with two aspects, furthermore, as we have already seen: one to live out or live up to a plan or narrative, large or small, particular or general; the other construct or choose that narrative. (p. 96)

I was afforded this opportunity within the CRTED. This was the case because like Relph (1976) I understand “the essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence” (p. 43) and his idea that “the relationship between community and place is ... a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other” (p. 34). Inviting the girls to meet Jean and to join me at the weekly meeting I was afforded the opportunity to lean into the specific concrete place of (CRTED) and to lean into what Connelly and Clandinin (2006) described as the commonplace of sociality. By this I mean I leaned into my past (CRTED) experiences as a place where I imagined, hoped and felt deeply alongside trusted colleagues. Both of my girls were invited to speak at the meetings, and both accepted. As I listened to them I was pulled up short (Kerdeman, 2003). As they spoke I understood my knowing of my daughters, my assumptions of them were “thrown into doubt” (Kerdman, 2003). Just as I had spent the previous years struggling to compose my stories, on the western landscape, my daughters’ stories to life by had not been static. They too were “in the midst of living and telling, retelling and reliving, the stories of the experiences that make up [their]... lives” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Carr (1986) reminds me, “... the past is still viewed in light of its connection to present and future in an ongoing project” (p. 98). Understanding this I was able to know myself and my girls’ stories to life by “as in the middle of a nested set of stories” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 63). A narrative conceptualization of stories to live by allowed me to experience this nesting within temporal shifting, such that I was hopeful.

My memories of my eldest daughter's (Kalaneet's) visit are more vivid because less time has passed since she was here. I have therefore chosen to include this story from Kalaneet's visit. I remember she began speaking by telling a little bit about herself and what she was presently doing. She completed this brief autobiography by describing how she and I began our studies at the same moment: she an undergraduate student at the Royal Military College and I a PhD student. She also spoke about her happiness for the opportunity to see me as a student at university and for the chance to meet with my friends and colleagues. I was so moved by what she said and I experienced deep feelings of pride.

It was my turn to speak after Kalaneet finished. When I attempted to speak I was leaking. I remember lifting my right hand up and placing it along my daughter's left cheek and then I began to weep (something I had not previously done at Research Issues). I had thought deeply about what it was I wanted to say (Carr's 1986). I wanted to speak to my colleagues; I wanted them to know me as a mother. I wanted to speak to my child, so she might know me as student and as a woman, who had shifted her ways of knowing, such that I was now capable of alongside relationships. Regardless of my plan, I was incapable of uttering a single word. Just as Edith was leaning into the stories of the university, I leaned into the place of the (CRTED) to carry my desired stories to Kalaneet and to my friends and colleagues. Later in the day I received emails from friends who commented on how moved they were to meet my child and by my response.

Later that day as we were attempting to navigate through a driving snowstorm, en route to a ski vacation, Kalaneet, in the dark quiet of the moment began to speak about my life and mostly to tell me how proud she was of me and how happy she was to be my child. I understood the counterstory⁹⁰ (Lindemann Nelson, 2001) of the CRTED had carried my stories to Kalaneet

⁹⁰ Lindemann Nelson (2001) when writing about "counterstories, which root out the master narratives in the tissue of stories that constitute an oppressive identity and replace them with stories that depict the person as morally worthy,

and my friends and colleagues, although I had not uttered a single word. In so doing I experienced a story where my daughter and my friends knew me as a woman deeply enmeshed on two landscapes. I experienced narrative coherence such that my past ways of knowing and naming myself and my daughters became a border. The place of the CRTED and its counterstory opened me to a border and allowed me to experience experiences of otherwise which I knew and named as educative (Dewey, 1938). These relived experiences were, in part, possible because of place: the CRTED. They were also possible because of the stories Kalaneet told, the stories friends emailed to me and the stories I told. This reliving was possible through stories. I threaded together multiple experiences, “events chosen with a view to their place in an implicit narrative” (Bruner, 2004, p. 692) in my efforts to relive my stories to live by, in my efforts for narrative coherence and in my efforts at life making (Bruner, 2004).

Summary Thoughts

Looking across the three narrative accounts to see what was visible was the purpose of this chapter. The narrative accounts were a detailed and in depth interpretation of the stories we told and of our alongside relationships which developed over 2 years. By metaphorically lying the narrative accounts alongside, four narrative threads were evident to me. The first is the importance of resonances across stories (Bateson, 2001). I noted some of the differences between reading the narrative accounts as single entities versus reading them as a set and attending to resonances across the set. In particular I wrote about the importance of foregrounding the relational as each of us struggled to compose educative future stories embedded within literacy tutoring.

supply the necessary means of resistance. Hence, resistance amounts to repair, the damaged identity is made whole” (p.150).

The second narrative thread which emerged was at the intersections of knowledge and context. Connelly and Clandinin coined the phrase ‘stories to live by’ (p. 4) in their efforts to narratively conceive of these intersections. Our efforts to shift our identity stories took place at these intersections. Naming this thread and reading it across the accounts allowed for deeper understandings of the complexity of our efforts to relive our stories to live by. Moreover, by understanding identities and identify shifts as narrative conceptualizations it becomes evident that desires to improve literacies, identity shifting phenomenon, are complex, temporal, ongoing projects and not merely an autonomous set of skills to be mastered.

The third thread which emerged as I spun the kaleidoscope was grounded in Greene’s (1995) ideas about the importance of inquiring into early, pre-reflective landscapes. Inquiring into these landscapes is part of our efforts to ground our early stories; to know ourselves in a process of continual rediscovery; and in our efforts to “configure what lies around [as] we bring patterns and structures into existence in the landscape” (p. 73). This proved to be particularly important for each of us as we struggled with the enduring mis-educative influences of stories from our early landscapes. As we struggled to relive our stories, each of us came into moments, individually and alongside, when we experienced ourselves shifting, temporally to the early landscapes. We came to know these moments as potentially educative if we were in relation and if we had courage to respond. The final thread to emerge was the importance of place in one’s efforts to shift one’s identities. Both Edith and I leaned into the stories of place as we struggled to relive our stories to live by.

In the following chapter I will look back and reflect upon this work and I will look forward at educational possibilities which might, like the narrative threads, emerge from this work.

Chapter 8: I Care Passionately

“Caring passionately about something isn’t against nature, and it isn’t against human nature. It’s what we’re here to do (Dillard, 1987, p. 161).

I remember a phone call with Joseph Henry Springer, a professor from my undergraduate days at Ryerson University. We were discussing my life as a doctoral student. I was complaining I did not have a clear notion of what I wanted to research; something that would have been useful given the demands of writing a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada application. Joseph Henry listened attentively and said, “Sandra it doesn’t matter what the topic of your research will be, it only matters that you care passionately about it, and about the people you work with” (personal communication, November, 2007). When I asked him to elaborate, he replied, “for the next four or five years, your research is going to be your steady diet, so make sure it is something you can eat, chew, swallow, appreciate and enjoy with absolute regularity” (personal communication, November, 2007). It was, and continues to be, sound advice. In time and through the processes of course work, candidacy, research and dissertation writing, I have been blessed by a subject, and by women, I am passionate about.

Embedded within and guided by a Dillard-like passion (1987), I will, in this chapter look back and reflect on the study. Clandinin (1986) wrote, “it is in reflection one comes to challenge one’s assumptions and reconstruct one’s experience” (p. 166). Having reflected, I will then look forward at educational possibilities which, like the narrative threads, emerge from this work. I will also be attentive to possibilities for new inquiries which might come into view. There are two ideas I will reflect upon. The first is the alongside relational spaces where our struggles to relive our stories to live by intersected with literacies. The second is the complexities of our stories to live by and their interconnections with living, teaching and learning. I will conclude by

musings over contributions this work has to research conversations about literacies, identities, teaching and learning.

Reflecting: A Look Back

I began the study with three intentions: I wanted to deepen understandings of how literacies influenced, shaped and re-shaped the identities of women with literacies less than they desire; I wanted to attend to shifts in identities which might occur through 6 months of intensive tutoring and ongoing research conversations; and I wondered how I, a maker of curriculum⁹¹, would influence the relational space and how the participants would shape it.

Alongside Relationships

This study was a narrative inquiry. As part of the inquiry, I came alongside Edith and Bella. In so doing I experienced “narrative inquiry [as] a relational journey” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60). Like Young (2003), the alongside relational space and the inquiry space “...we developed together and maintained throughout our time together was based on trust, respect and the interconnections of our stories, our experiences, our lives” (p. 138). Beginning with the hard, endured stories Edith and Bella shared from their early school and home landscapes we remembered other stories and sometimes we temporally revisited experiences and felt feelings we thought were in the past. We then moved to 6 months of tutoring and research conversations. Following this we continued to develop our alongside relationships as we continued to meet for research conversations and to socialize. I now understand it was the alongside relationships, through time, including forward and backward temporal shifting which

⁹¹ Connelly and Clandinin (1988) wrote, “... to think of curriculum means to think with the terms “experience” and “situation” and they wrote, “ the teacher is the most important agent, after the student... in a curriculum situation” (p. 13).

afforded deeper understandings of Bella and Edith's complex lives and of their struggles to relive their stories to live by. It is this alongside relationship I would like to reflect upon.

Because this is a narrative inquiry I understood I would have to negotiate relationships with participants. Within the context of a narrative inquiry methodology, said relationships are referred to as "alongside". Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described these relationships as follows:

We settled in for the long haul, working alongside our participants, making ourselves useful in whatever ways we could, and trying to maintain the momentum that brought us together. At first, the forces of collaboration are weak and the arrangements feel tenuous. ... Always in the midst of being negotiated... Good narrative working relationships carry with them a sad and wistful sense born of the possibility of temporariness. (pp. 71-72)

Before beginning this study I read these words on more than one occasion. I read them as part of assigned readings for the Narrative Inquiry course. I read them as I 'imagined up' the research and again when I wrote my research proposal. Moreover, I engaged in conversations with colleagues where we discussed alongside relationships. Furthermore, I listened at weekly research meetings within the CRTED as colleagues spoke about the participants they were coming alongside. In the midst of these experiences I was also meeting weekly with Jean. At these meetings I experienced Jean living out an alongside relationship, while inviting me to do likewise. Coming alongside Jean was a slow process, which, for me, included stops, starts, bumps and tension-filled moments. This was the case because fundamentally I had to shift the way I understood the academy and ontologically I had to shift how I understood experience. During three previous degrees I successfully navigated my way through the hierarchal system of the academy. I knew my place, I knew what to expect and, for the most part, and most often, I

knew how to behave. Being invited to come alongside Jean and to participate with the CRTED, I was afforded a counterstory to the grand narrative of the academy (Lindemann Nelson, 2001). It was within the CRTED and it was during my weekly meetings with Jean that I experienced alongside relationships. As time moved, I increasingly felt I understood what an alongside relationship was, however, this knowing slipped.

One Tuesday morning as we discussed meeting with participants, Jean asked if I had thought about who I was going to be when I met Edith (personal communication, October, 2009). This question dumbfounded me because, of course, I was going to be me, who else could I possibly be. For the next week I walked around wondering about Jean's question. It was this question that helped me draw many bits into a whole, such that I experienced narrative coherence (Carr, 1986). I drew forward what I learned from Jean's Curriculum Studies and Narrative Inquiry courses. In particular I understood my ontological and epistemological ways of knowing and studying the world had shifted. Grounding my understandings in Dewey's (1938) ideas about the nature of experience I understand experience as personal, social and continual. This ontological understanding of experience resonated with me because I appreciate with stories to live by "... there is always a history, it is always changing, and it is always going somewhere" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). As I came to understand experience narratively I understood I have a narrative history, I have potential for growth, my experiences are continual and they involve relationships with people. As I made my way in the world I also understood I was living, telling, retelling and reliving my stories to live by (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999, p. 4). Reliving my stories to live by was a slow, ongoing struggle to shift my identities. In part this is the case because of the temporality of Dewey's (1983) notion of experience, such that one experience grows out of previous ones and it writes itself into future ones.

These ontological understandings did nothing to diminish the anxiety I experienced as I waited for research participants to appear. In the midst of my worries about participants never appearing I regularly returned to knowing I had indeed relived my stories to live by. When once I understood people as individuals, I now understood them as individuals and as “always in relation, always in a social context” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). There was no avoiding it; I was going to be in relation with participants. I also knew stories from my early landscape were shaping my worries about engaging in alongside relationships. Often this temporal, drawing forward left me feeling incapable of and with no desire for alongside relationships.

Today I understand my coming alongside, living in relationship for the past two years with Edith and Bella, afforded me opportunities to relive my stories to live by and it allowed me to deepen my appreciations of narrative conceptualizations of my personal practical knowledge, context and my identities. I also experienced a shift in my identity in terms of how I know myself. Through six months of tutoring and research conversations and a year of follow-up research conversations and friendships, I have come to know and name myself as worthy of, capable of and desiring of, alongside relationships. Prior to the study beginning I knew myself as an outsider to the mainstream (Lugones, 1987) relational world. Through our living alongside I was afforded multiple opportunities to co-compose stories to live by where I knew myself as non-authoritarian, where I knew myself as a woman who was perceiving other women with loving eyes. Frye (1983) wrote, “the loving eye is a contrary of the arrogant eye” (Frye, 1983, p. 75).

Leaning into examples of alongside relationships which surrounded me within the CRTED, I understood I could ask myself who I wanted to be in the relational space. I asked myself, who I wanted to be as Edith and Bella’s teacher and who I wanted to be as their friend. I

also asked myself, who my being was affording them to be. I came to know these as guiding questions. When I slowed myself down and kept these questions in the foreground, I experienced joy; I was happy to be tutoring with Edith and Bella. I also experienced myself as more attentive to the earlier experiences which the tutoring was drawing forward. Awake to some of these hard endured stories, and increasingly trusting our alongside relationship I experienced myself as playful. Initially this frightened me because I had previously known and named playfulness as being reactive, alert and able to strike. I spoke with Jean about my concern and again she asked me to think about who I wanted to be. As I continuously returned to this question, of who I wanted to be, I was increasingly able to enter tutoring with “... a playful attitude, [which] turn[ed] the activity into play” (Lugones, 1987, p. 16).

I began the studying wondering how I would influence the relational space. Today I know my involvement with this study as a series of longitudinal affordances which were possible because of our alongside relationships. The first ongoing affordance embedded with our alongside relationship was repeated opportunities to wake up to the complexities and temporality of stories to live by and to wonder how the stories shape and re-shape teaching and learning spaces. I was asleep to this. I was singularly focussed on driving the remediation bus in my efforts to help students master an autonomous list of literacy skills. As the complexities of Edith and Bella’s stories from early school and home landscapes were continually drawn forward into the context of our tutoring classroom, I woke up and attended. This was important because in response to my waking up I shifted my personal practical knowledge such that I learned to slow down, to attend, to listen, to be guided, to change on the go and to move away from expert lesson plans. I learned to do these things because increasingly I was awake to the complexities of Edith and Bella’s stories as they were drawn forward into tutoring.

On The Complexities and Shaping Influences of Early Stories to Live By

A second ongoing affordance was the opportunity to inquire into the stories Edith and Bella shared from their early school and home landscapes and to wonder how they were drawn forward such that they shaped and reshaped the tutoring and our developing alongside relationships. Both women told stories which reflected how they knew themselves as children upon school and home landscapes. Edith spoke about her life in the special education class and upon the broader school landscape. In both places, she was bullied because she was in special education and because of her family situation. She regularly experienced abuse at the hands of other children, teachers and a system which was not prepared to meet her needs. At the age of 15 Edith returned to her mother's home to care for her younger brothers. While she completed the two year high school program she had been placed in, she did so knowing teachers had not taught her to read or write, skills she desperately wanted. Later in her life, following a vehicular accident Edith spent 15 years within adult literacy centres. Through the years her involvement with the centres increased such that she was board member, a committee member and a trusted volunteer and tutor. Through these experiences she did not come to know and name herself as literate, as she understood the word. When we began the study she self-identified as wanting to improve her literacies. Through six months of tutoring and a year of follow up research conversations Edith had moments when she knew and named herself as literate, however, at the end of the tutoring she wanted more time, more tutoring, more alongside relationship with Bella and me. While she struggled to relive her stories to live by she regularly experienced mis-educative knowing drawn forward from her early school landscapes. Edith knew this was happening and she knew to remind herself that was then and this in now, nevertheless, mis-

educative experiences from the early school and home landscapes regularly shaped the tutoring space and Edith's efforts to relive her stories to live by.

This was also the case with Bella, who had constructed a plotline of distrust towards schools and teachers. When I asked her to engage with multisensory learning techniques, she refused. When we spoke about her refusal, she described her acute discomfort. She also described a knowing she was struggling to compose. She said at some point she experienced my request that she use her hand as a vote of confidence; a knowing by another, that she was capable. She described feeling smart and feeling she was normal, like other people. Bella also spoke about the tutoring. She named it as too short. We tutored for 6 months; Bella suggested 6 years would have been more appropriate.

Bella and Edith experienced mis-educative experiences upon early home and school landscapes. These experiences were ongoing, temporal, identity-shaping influences. These endured and embodied stories to live by were drawn forward into the context of tutoring such that they shaped and re-shaped teaching, learning and the women's struggles to relive their stories by. Through time and in part because of our monthly research conversations, we knew and named these mis-educative stories, however, we could not prevent them from shaping the tutoring spaces. Because of our alongside relationship we were afforded opportunities to inquire into these early stories to live by, to their shaping influences and to imagine other ways of knowing. As we tutored, as our alongside relationship developed through time, we experienced traction stories, which afforded moments when we knew ourselves as otherwise, as capable, as normal, as literate. However, both women experienced the tutoring and the study as too short. They both wanted more time together in their efforts to know and name themselves such that

they were more consistently able to relive the early mis-educative identity-shaping stories to live by and know themselves as literate.

This study also afforded many experiences where I was in the midst of co-composing traction stories in my struggles to shift my stories to live by. In the midst of these experiences, which were always relational, I dragged forward, through time, bits of stories in my efforts to relive coherent stories, such that I knew and named myself as capable of alongside relationships. It was not a single traction story, rather it was a series of experiences in a variety of contexts which I drew forward. I do not mean to suggest there will never be a context when knowing from early landscapes is not drawn forward as mis-educative shaping influences. Rather I want to argue relational incompetence is no longer my default setting.

What I find remarkable as I write this final chapter is the realization that Bella and Edith never quit on their efforts to know and name themselves as literate. From the time they were little girls, struggling upon school and home landscapes, their desires for literacies have never diminished, never faltered. Like Heilbrun (1989) they have never stopped wanting “to take [their] place in whatever discourse is essential to action and [to own their].... right to have one’s part matter (p. 18). They understand in order to sit at the tables Heilbrun described, they must be literate. Moreover, they struggled courageously to attenuate some of the early hard stories they endured. In their struggles for literacies they have repeatedly “... undertaken something difficult, something new, to reroot... [themselves] in [their] own faculties... For in such moments, life is not just a thing one wears, it is a thing one does and is” (Heilbrun, p. 44). And for me, having come alongside Bella and Edith over the past two years, “I emerged somehow changed, refigured, with my life altered to extend the range of possible reactions and experiences, however subtle or internal” (Heilbrun, p. 49). I believed I have shifted my identities, in part because of the

traces Edith and Bella left upon me. Heilbrun (1989) said traces “... are left only by work that has overmastered us, work which we cannot, after we once begin it, imagine it not in our life” (p. 51). It is my sincere hope that in coming alongside these two remarkable women and having written about our time together I have captured “... a sense of their inherent value, a promise of their chance for change, and the discovery that someone understands and can convey the courage and gallantry of their existence” (p. 72).

A Look Forward

Sometimes I think it is enough that Edith, Bella and I have learned from each other and that I ought to allow you the reader to glean what you may from these pages. Some might argue this is a lazy way to conclude, however, I am unsure. I remind myself of the methodology of narrative inquiry and I know I must look forward to what Jean refers to as “so what, who cares”. In the midst of thinking about the look forward, I understand the stories Edith and Bella shared and the stories we co-composed are significant beyond our own lives. I know our stories are socially significant because as a society we understand the literacy rates of a population are important when framed within social and economic development or lack thereof. According to an IPSOS Reid survey (2010) nine in ten (90%) Canadians ‘agree’ that improving literacy levels in Canada is key to improving the country’s economy. Furthermore 95% ‘agree’ that literacy training is critical to improving job prospects.

I find the language interesting, ‘literacy training’. I would not think to describe the work Edith, Bella and I engaged in as literacy training. It was so much more; it was complex, temporal, alongside relational, recursive, joyful, and sometimes very difficult. It was not, however, training. Perhaps then our alongside journey tells a different story. It tells the stories of three women, one who knows herself as literate, yet desiring to improve her relational skills and

two, who are gifted teachers of the relational, who by the way, wanted to improve their literacies. When framed this way, we are teachers and learners on a journey where we can expect to develop deeply meaningful, longitudinal relationships while struggling to shift our identities.

Canadian Literacy Levels

The 2003 International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey determined that 58 per cent of Canadian adults possess literacy skills which permit them to meet most of their day-to-day reading requirement, however, 42 percent of adults are living with low levels of literacy skills. The study also found that adults falling within the 42 percent bracket had lower levels of employment and lower, on average yearly earnings. Nationwide the findings fluctuated; Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Quebec and Nunavut have more people with low literacies than the national average. Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan have fewer people with low literacies. Nevertheless even in those provinces which posted the best results, three out of ten adults, aged 16 and over performed at the lower literacy levels. As a society we know these numbers to be significant because the rates have been tied to employment, poverty, health and incarceration rates. Moreover, the study found:

While there is evidence that education plays a key role in the formation of skills, other factors are implicated in the acquisition, maintenance and loss of skills over a lifetime, including the quality of initial education.... and the intensity of participation in adult education and training. (p. 3)

Literacy Programs

The literacy needs of Canadians are addressed through collaborative efforts between the provincial and territorial educational authorities, the federal government, and the non-governmental sector. Various groups design programs for Canadians of all ages. The Council of

Ministers of Education (CMEC), formed in 1967 by the provincial and territorial ministers, is a forum. It was created to be: a forum for discussions, a place where educational initiatives could be engaged in cooperatively, and as a place to represent the interests of the provinces and territories. CMEC works on joint goals in a broad range of activities at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels.

In April 2008, CMEC created Learn Canada 2020. The purpose of Learn Canada 2020 is to address the education needs of all Canadians. Learn Canada 2020 works to ensure all Canadians have access to lifelong, quality educational opportunities. It purports there are direct links between a population with high levels of literacy and a robust, knowledge based economy. As well it makes direct links between literacy rates and a socially progressive, sustainable society for all Canadians. (Learn Canada 2020 through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2008)

It has outlined what it refers to as *The Four Pillars of Lifelong Learning*:

- Early Childhood Learning and Development: All children should have access to high quality early childhood education that ensures they arrive at school ready to learn.
- Elementary to High School Systems: All children in our elementary to high school systems deserve teaching and learning opportunities that are inclusive and that provide them with world-class skills in literacy, numeracy, and science.
- Postsecondary Education: Canada must increase the number of students pursuing postsecondary education by increasing the quality and accessibility of postsecondary education.
- Adult Learning and Skills Development: Canada must develop an accessible, diversified, and integrated system of adult learning and skills development that delivers training when

Canadians need it. (Learn Canada 2020 through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, 2008)

Within the final pillar, Learn Canada 2020 calls for a raise in the literacy levels of Canadians.

Edith and Bella are two Canadians who sought out opportunities to improve their literacy practices. They were longitudinal participants of adult education centres. In spite of their many years of involvement, they began this study wanting to improve their literacies and to know and name themselves as ‘normal’ and as ‘literate’. While I am unsure precisely how Bella and Edith would define normal and literate, I do know they began the study and they ended it not having experienced sufficient traction stories such that they know and name themselves as ‘normal’ and ‘literate’. They did have experiences where, in the moment and in reflection, they named themselves as ‘literate’ and ‘normal’. Both women commented on needing more time, more tutoring, more experiences where they could try out their stories to live by. As Edith struggled to relive her stories to live by she latched on to the place of the university in her efforts to name herself as a university student and I her university teacher. Bella had moments when she felt she got it. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) when describing the beginning of an alongside relationship, used the metaphor of a car’s engine catching to describe a good start. I am hopeful our study, our alongside relationship, was a catching story, one that supports Bella and Edith in the future stories. I am hopeful the study was indeed a catching story for Edith has registered in the local community college with a January, 2012 start date.

In summary, I believe Edith and Bella’s hard, endured stories from their early school and home landscapes and our co-composed stories through two years of an alongside relationship are socially significant because as a society we believe it is important to provide opportunities for all citizens to improve their literacies. Bella and Edith’s stories inform us it is not enough to provide

opportunities. This study highlights that as educators we must inquire into how our pedagogies and our personal practical knowledge intersects with the embodied complexities of stories to live by brought to class each day with students. Moreover, this work highlights the affordances of entering an alongside relational space with adult literacy learners. Within an alongside relationship we can expect to learn from students, expect to come away knowing ourselves as more awake, and perhaps having relived our stories to live by. Through time, as I awoke to the shaping influences of stories to live by I came to know the tutoring and our developing alongside relationships as space of affordance. Into this alongside relationship space we each, struggled to shift our identities. Part of these processes involved shifting the hierarchal playing field between teacher and student. This is, I believe, a crucial element in adult education because if the teacher leads with genuine curiosity and is expectant of the unforeseen learning, the possibility for a counterstory exists. A counterstory where teacher and students are willing to risk, as they try on traction stories in their struggles to relive their stories, and compose narrative coherence.

Looking to the Larger Body of Research Where This Work is Situated

At the outset I hoped this study would allow for other conceptualizations of the relationship between literacy and identities. Narrative conceptualizations of personal practical knowledge, context and identities (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) allowed me to account for a wide range of mediators as Edith and Bella's struggled to shift their identities and know themselves as more literate. Moreover, the narrative conceptualizations allowed me to stay clear of deficit-oriented constructs of literacies. Rather, using the narrative inquiry three dimensional space I inquired into complex experiences, through time, backwards and forwards as we struggled to relive our stories. As we inquired into identity shaping, stories to live by from early home and school landscape, Bella and Edith's literacy deficiencies were no longer merely

statistics. Instead we understood them as complex, longitudinal identity shaping stories. This was important because understanding the literacy skill gaps within a narrative conceptualization of identities afforded opportunities to know and name Edith and Bella as knowledge producers, as teachers and as women, I came to respect, admire and care deeply about. As we shared our narrative histories and as I inquired into the stories, I researched the societal contexts in which some of the early stories were embedded. As a result I came to understand the stories differently, within narrative conceptualizations and as a result I deepened my understandings of the women's struggles on school landscapes. In turn this allowed me to appreciate how these early mis-educative stories continued to reverberate through time manifesting in the stories we co-composed through tutoring. Furthermore, narrative conceptualizations of identities made identity shifts possible. This was critical given that each of us began the study wanting to shift our identities.

As we struggled to do this we experienced what I have come to name as traction stories. This notion is grounded in Carr's (1986) ideas about human struggles for narrative coherence. A metaphorical use of the word traction seems to fit with the idea of a struggle. If one imagines a car stuck in snow or mud, what the vehicle most needs to move forward (to shift its story) is traction. Most often the car is not propelled forward as the result of a single thrust (one time experience). Rather, it is the rocking forward and backward (temporal movement) which is accomplished by a team of powerful humans who support the car as it struggles for traction. Once traction is experienced and the car shifts there is no guarantee it will not, at some other time, once again require traction. However, awake to stories, the driver and those supporting her will have memories of traction stories and therefore will be able to offer educative support. In conclusion, I understand traction stories as important to those wanting to relive their stories to

live by. Within narrative conceptualizations of identities, identity shifts are possible. For Edith, Bella and me the shifts in our identities were important because they helped us experience deep desires, after years of struggling. In part this dissertation was written for women desiring to shift their identities so they might know it is possible and they might know themselves as otherwise as Edith, Bella and I have done.

Finally, now that I have returned to working within a school, my wonders have broadened to include the following. How do I help teachers to: understand their lives narratively, their teaching as a shaping influence in the identity making struggles of their students and colleagues and to understand the lives of each person upon a school landscape as complex, temporal and unfolding. I experience these wonders in the midst of regularly being storied as the vice principal who will listen, who will make time and who is doing a good job. These kind words have afforded me an opportunity and a willingness to inquire into my practice. Through this process of autobiographical inquiry, I experience myself leaning into the relational, into the complexity and into the temporality of identities and struggles to shift identities. When I foreground my ontological understandings of narrative constructs of identities and the importance of the relational, I am afforded a space from which to respond thoughtfully. And it is within this space that I regularly experience myself as capable of learning alongside each person who is or has been shaped and reshaped by school. And last evening when I spoke with Edith over the telephone and listened as she shared excitement and trepidation about her upcoming start date at a community college, I understood she too, was continuing her journey to shift her identities.

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