A Tale of Two Selves: A Critical Narrative Inquiry into Gender and Systematic Discourse in Teaching

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Through reflexive writing practices, this thesis examines the ways in which gender is inscripted onto identity through teaching practice and lived experience. Through writing reflexive narratives and creating research fictions, this thesis represents an inquiry into how identity recursively maps onto teaching practice, and how writing became an emancipatory and transformational experience for me.

I do this by accounting for and presenting my current and past thinking using different genres (including autoethnography, narrative, fictional and letter writing) to illustrate the different facets of my self, and also to research and write my self. This is achieved in three stages. Part one is a fictional conversation built and woven for the text to achieve the intended effect of outlining the research method and significance of this study, a discussion of the literature review with expert authorities embedded, and a description of criteria for validity. Part two uses writing as a method of inquiry, whereby letters (using voices of two "characters" - - both of whom are voices of my self) are crafted to interrogate my individual experiences. They were written reflexively using systematic sociological introspection. Part three is the analysis and the crafted letters are treated as data. Emphasis was on abstract analysis and two themes were found that held within and across the letters – gender and power issues and dichotomous thinking in our western culture.

In this thesis I argue for, and demonstrate that practice can be transformed through writing and reflexive thought. I also suggest that by using voice, I can work to dismantle ruling relations, and dichotomous structures in our culture. I argue that exploring reflexive voice can lead to connectedness, caring and interdependence. In

giving voice to the different experiences of my self, I show how in practice and in theory, what it means to live and work with a different notion of the self - - one that is constituted with/in gender and other cultural structures, but one that is also capable of critical transformation.

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In addition, I would like to thank the "Narrative Group" in the Faculty of Education at UPEI, of which Liz and Anne-Louise both facilitated. This group was formed in 2004 to serve as a discussion group for Masters students wishing to explore the use of personal narratives, in particular autoethnography as a form of research.

This group allowed us to work together in a supportive environment to share our concerns, thoughts and writing samples. Discussions within the group often moved our knowledge and understandings of narrative writing as a form of research to new levels. I extremely grateful to the women of this group for their time taken to explore my writing and to share and discuss their thoughts with me – this project could not have been a success without their support.

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PART ONE

> The fictionalization of educational experience offers researchers the opportunity to import fragments of data from various real events in order to speak to the heart of social consciousness – thus providing the protection of anonymity to the research participants without stripping away the rawness of real happenings (Clough, 2002, p. 8)

When I went into work one morning before Christmas, I wasn't prepared for a conversation that I had with a colleague regarding my Master of Education thesis. Darlene, being a scientist, and a quantitative researcher, expressed more of an interest than anyone (apart from my thesis advisor and other faculty members) had ever shown in my work – as well, she had many potent questions.

Those questions initially caught me off guard, but in the end I found our conversation to be quite rewarding and important in explaining and defending my thesis topic. While she did not agree with everything I was doing, I believe she was coming to understand the reason that I was moving in the direction that I was. The following account of our conversation is presented in order to introduce this thesis, as well as to describe the:

- topic of research for this thesis,
- significance of my study,
- types of literature I reviewed,
- research method I used, and
- validity of the approach.

In order to make Darlene's character more critical of my approach, and to ask more challenging questions, this account is highly fictionalized. You may ask, "Is using a fictionalized approach appropriate in research?" and I would have to say "Yes". I hope you will agree with me as you read on. As Maclure (2003) suggests

> educational research is, unavoidably, a rhetorical affair. Like any other texts, research texts - reports, articles, instruments - are 'fabrications'. Their truths and findings are put together - that is, built or woven (depending on the sense of 'fabric' that one prefers) to achieve particular effects and structures - rather than artlessly culled from a pre-existing world Out There (p. 80)

So, I too, built our conversation to achieve the particular intended effects of this text. The fictionalized account is revealed below.

TOPIC OF STUDY AND RATIONALE

"How are you doing in your coursework Jillian?" Darlene asked, over the cubicle wall.

"Oh fine" I replied, content to leave it at that.

"You must be busy with two little ones at home, working, and your coursework. I don't know how you do it. You're not working on your thesis at this stage are you?"

"As a matter of fact I am" I said, keeping my head down, as I checked my emails. It was not like Darlene to be so inquisitive, so I was expecting that she would stop asking questions soon, or at least not require a lengthy response from me. However, I was wrong.

"What is the topic of your thesis?" she asked.

For a moment, I felt stumped. First thing in the morning, and she's asking me the "big" question about my master's thesis??? I knew what I was hoping to do my thesis research on, but I was not prepared yet to share that with anyone, especially because the topic, and the method of research I was hoping to use, was "alternative" to most people (and I knew it would seem especially so to her). However, here was a listening ear, and I had to tell her something. So, I started with some background information so she could understand my choice.

I explained to Darlene that when I was in the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) program, I began to understand the complexity and primacy of teachers' experiences. It was then, through the influence of a professor, that I was urged to reflect on my past experiences to see how these experiences influenced my wanting to become a teacher. Over time, the more reflexive I became about my experiences, going back and forth, I started to see my experiences and struggles in a new way. The more I thought back about my experiences I discovered that essentially, these experiences changed how I now think about the world. I began to believe in the powerful influence of experience for educators, in modeling to our students, in liberatory education, and transformational teaching and learning. I became passionate about understanding teacher identity. And, I realized that as my own identity evolved from a single woman to wife, mother, student, employee, student again, etc, so too did my understandings.

"You know yourself Darlene, teachers are important role models to hundreds, even thousands, of students during the course of a career. Just a handful of teachers

will greatly influence the development of an entire geographic area, or a large cadre of people regardless of their geography. Therefore, teachers are very influential in our communities, our country."

Darlene nodded in agreement. I continued by telling her that I learned in my B.Ed program that it is widely believed that a teacher's method reflects much about who they are; a teacher's approach is inescapably individualistic, reflecting the entirety of one's background, knowledge and experience: in other words, a performance of one's "self." To the extent that the teaching method directly influences students, one concludes that teachers have an enormous responsibility to know - - and continuously develop their "self" in order to achieve teaching excellence. I told Darlene, that I not only want to be a teacher, but a teacher of teachers. I described to her that if successful in my desire, I will pursue my ways of knowing with new teachers, and continue to study - - *the self who teaches.*

"Darlene," I said, "I've recently become a teacher - - but I wonder if I really 'know' my 'self' who teaches? I may to some degree, but if my research is correct, then it is my obligation to find out more. That's what I hope to do with my master's thesis - - to critically examine the ways my knowledge of education has been informed through my different experiences. The purpose of my thesis is to find my 'self', to engage in an inquiry of my teacher identity."

Darlene was now almost rolling her eyes....I could tell she wasn't impressed with this description. Then, she threw out another fundamental challenge:

"How does finding your 'self' serve as research for a master's thesis, and what is its purpose?"

"I can understand your reaction Darlene," I said, "as this type of research is not typical or traditional, but it is becoming more common in many disciplines, including education. The aim is to explore the 'messiness' of what it means to be a teacher. I want to stir up, interrogate, disrupt the 'I' that is taken for granted in my teacher identity," I said.

"Well that may be of relevance to you, but it isn't exactly research. In fact, don't you think your research is a little bit too self-absorbed? I mean, how will researching yourself be of relevance to the educational community?"

I began to sense that Darlene's opinions were hitting closer to home, as this very question had also crossed my own mind many times. This was when I knew I was going to have to roll up my sleeves and try out an early defence of my thesis!!

I remembered reading *The Ethnographic I* by Caroline Ellis, a guru in autoethnography. In it she stated:

> It's being self-absorbed to pretend that you are outside of what you study and not impacted by the same forces as others. It's self-absorbed to mistakenly think that your actions and relationships need no reflexive thought. To write about the self is to write about social experience" (Ellis, 2004, p. 34)

"It is true Darlene, many academics would dismiss this type of research as self-serving or therapeutic, but I think differently. It is my belief that this type of research can make a unique contribution to the field of educational and will tremendously guide my personal practice as an educator. I suggest that there is power in this sort of research, and view understanding the self as a natural evolution toward the

understanding of teaching. I am of the assumption that the 'leverage' from understanding self, and engaging all teachers in it, would have a tremendous impact on our education system."

I went on to tell Darlene that the study of the self in teaching is a relatively recent practice and that in the past, very little emphasis was placed on knowing the self who teaches. I explained that by the 1980s, due to work by researchers such as Clandinin and Connelly, the personal accounts of teachers increasingly began to be taken into consideration when conducting research in order to consider the influences of the personal, contextual, historical, political, societal, and experiential on teaching practices (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 6). I told her that in fact, a number of writers and researchers such as Cole & Knowles (2000), Clough (2002) and Palmer (1998) have come to believe that teachers "know" through a variety of ways. These "modes of teacher knowing" include such things as knowing through examination of personal histories, reflexive inquiry into experiences, and knowing through their everyday situated lives.

"In other words, Darlene, because the act of teaching is informed by multiple forms of knowledge and represents a variety of personal, professional and contextual knowledge (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 7), teachers need to be aware of the 'self that teaches' and how it has been shaped by contextual influences, because it is this self that will be teaching their students."

I dug into my briefcase and found a quote by Pinar (1981) which I shared with Darlene:

> Understanding of self is not narcissism; it is a precondition and a concomitant condition to the understanding of others. The process of education is not situated – and cannot be understood – in the observer, but in we who undergo it. In its extreme formulation, truth itself lies in the relation of self to situation, knower to known, in the mode of consciousness which allows the situation to articulate itself, allows the qualitative to surface, the problematic to be resolved. (Pinar as cited in Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 25)

Since she seemed to be nodding in agreement, I continued by explaining my hope that by critically examining my self and my experiences, that it would better help me to understand others. I went on to describe some of my readings to Darlene, in particular the writing of Palmer 1998; Bruner 2001, 2002; and Cole & Knowles 2000 and their findings on knowing the "self".

"Jerome Bruner" I said, "believes selfhood is as much a matter of cultural concern as it is of individual concern, because selfhood involves "a commitment to others as well as being 'true to oneself' (Bruner, 2002, p. 69). Palmer (1998) is of a similar view, as he believes that good teaching requires that we understand the inner sources of ourselves because we teach who we are. He says that there is much research into what, why and how teachers teach, but little research about the 'who' who teaches. Cole & Knowles (2000) also are of the belief that teachers 'have a special responsibility for self-awareness and for clarity and integrity, because teachers are in such a powerful position to witness, influence, and shepherd the choices of others' (p. 27)".

While I was telling this to Darlene, I was remembering my readings in Parker Palmer's book *Courage to Teach* . Palmer (1998) states "Who is the self who teaches?" is the most fundamental question we can ask about teaching. He said, "by addressing it openly and honestly, alone and together, we can serve our students more faithfully, enhance our own well being, make common cause with colleagues, and help education bring more light and life to the world" (p. 6).

As I was talking, my resolve was further boosted by remembering C. Wright Mills' conception of self-research, and what self-study ought to accomplish. He clearly articulated the fact that in education,

> For public theory to influence educational practice, it must be translated through the personal. Only when a theory can be seen to have efficacy in a practical arena will that theory have a life. As Mills warns, articulation of the personal doesn't really become research until it is connected through evidence and analysis to the issues and troubles of a time and place (Mills, as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 15).

As stated by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), "when biography and research are joined, when the issue confronted by the self is shown to have relationship to and bearing on the context and ethos of a time, then self study moves to research" (p. 15).

Just as I finished talking, I noticed on my watch that Darlene and I had been talking for over 45 minutes!!

"Oh my goodness Darlene" I exclaimed, "I am SO sorry ...it's almost 8:45! You must want to get to work. I am sorry for keeping you for so long, but I really appreciate you talking with me!"

"No problem, at all. It was my pleasure. I have really enjoyed listening! If you would like, we could get together at lunch to talk about it a bit more?"

"Sure," I said, agreeing to Darlene's offer (with mixed emotions!) "that is most appreciated! I'll see you in the lunch room at noon?"

"Noon it is" said Darlene.

Before going in to the lunch room, I made sure I gathered up my binder containing my literature review and quotes that I had gathered to support my thesis. Darlene was a little late for lunch, so I began to eat my sandwich, and was flipping through my files and research. Just then, in walks Darlene and begins to dig further into my previously "private" world:

"So, how will understanding your 'self' influence what you do as an educator?"

"Basically, I assume it will provide me with a strong foundation, helping me deal with many major issues that teachers face, such as the temptation to cynicism, for example. Palmer", I explained, "suggests 'the more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more surefooted our teaching – and living – becomes' (Palmer, 1998, p. 5). He strongly believes that good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. He states 'identity lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death' (p. 13). According to Palmer, Ghandi believed that experimenting with the complex field of diverse forces on our lives is how we learn about our integrity. And then, when our integrity is

deepened, we can live from what Palmer describes as an undivided self. He writes, 'in the undivided self, every major thread of one's life experience is honoured" and "such a self, inwardly integrated, is able to make the outward connections on which good teaching depends' (1998, p.15)."

"It sounds a bit hokey, if you don't mind me saying so! Is this just the dream world of a couple of authors in this field, or is it more widespread than that?"

"Oh, it's pretty widespread," I replied. "I don't know if you are familiar with the writings of bell hooks, but she wrote 'teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own well being' (hooks, 1994, p. 15) and that the professors who do embrace the challenge of self-actualization 'will be better able to create pedagogical practices that engage students, providing them with ways of knowing that enhance their capacity to live fully and deeply' (p. 22). She quotes Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh who emphasized that the 'practice of a healer, therapist, teacher, or any helping professional should be directed toward his or herself first because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people' (p. 5). I fully agree with this view as well, and I assume Palmer (1998) would too. We need to be happy ourselves as individuals, and we need to seem real to our students. hooks wrote that if we expose our life stories to others as well as ourselves, then we can seem more real as educators. She states in her book *Teaching to Transgress* she is 'grateful to the many women and men who dare to create theory from the location of pain and struggle, who courageously expose wounds to give us their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys. Their work is liberatory' (p. 74)".

I knew one of the strongest themes of my research would be how my experiences could be used to make me a better teacher - - so I decided Darlene was ready for a full dose of theory. I explained to her how other academics share this same view. I described how Mooney (1957) in *The Researcher Himself*, wrote that research is a personal venture which, is worth doing for its impact of self-realization. He stated that we want "a way of holding assumptions about research which makes it possible to integrate the pursuit of science and research with the acceptance and fruitful development of one's self" (as cited in Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.13). Bullough and Pinnegar also found self-study has a common sense appeal. They asked "shouldn't teacher educators study their own practice, since one's practice, as Charles Taylor (1981) suggests, who we are?" (p. 14).

"When you spoke about bell hooks, you said that she finds that self study can be liberatory. But how can theoretical work be liberatory?"

"According to Patti Lather (1991), bell hooks (1994) and others, theoretical work that disrupts mainstream theory is liberatory".

"Do YOU propose to disrupt mainstream theory, from your stories?"

"Well, there have been particular experiences in my life that when I think back about them, lead me to a personal, experiential understanding of educational pedagogy. I suggest there are many links between life and learning in schools, that our life experiences affect our inner and outer selves, but also influence our ways of teaching and learning. I also agree with hooks' (1994) assumption "when our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of

collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice" (p.61). So, yes, I guess I do propose to disrupt the mainstream, but perhaps just a bit!"

"You say our life experiences affect our inner and outer selves. What do you mean by this, and how can this influence our ways of teaching and learning?"

"Well, I agree with scholars such as Palmer (1998) who believe that while it is important for educators to understand and reflect on their own experiences, it is also important to understand how our experiences connect with others and the largeness of life, and to weave the two together. It's like the saying: 'no man is an Island'. Each person is connected to everything else in life. So, what I do does not only affect myself, and what others do, can also affect me".

While I was talking, I remembered reading in Fullan (1993) how Land and Jarman (1992) assume that "everything exists as a set of connections with the world around it. They stress, the notion that things are separate, is factually wrong. Rather they assume everything and everybody is connected. Everything affects everything else. No matter how different, no matter how far away, we are all part of an interconnected whole. The fact is that no real division can be found between ourselves, other people and the world around us - unless we create it in our minds" (p. 98). My readings and research have found that many scientists, psychologists and theorists hold this view. Whether it is called "personal and universal flow" (Cskszentimihalyi, 1990), "invisible whole" or "systems thinking" (Senge, 1990), or "worldmindedness" (Pike & Selby, 1999), the idea is the same: we are all connected as part of a whole. Fullan (1993) states "Being committed to the whole, is of essential practical value to surviving productively in complex global societies" (p. 99). As

such, I feel it is important that as an educator, that I am knowledgeable about my interconnected systems, so that I can think holistically, and then model this to others.

Darlene was now sitting beside me on the couch in the lunch room. I was feeling less nervous now, but still, on the spot. Darlene, being a scientist and researcher herself, was interested in finding out more, and I was warming up to the challenge.

"So do you not feel it's important to include quantitative findings in your thesis?"

"I do feel quantitative research is important, but as Knowles (2004) indicated, qualitative research is recently more often used for educational purposes because of the human element. In fact, educational researchers today are becoming increasingly concerned with the experiential and emotive qualities of human experience. For example, sociologists such as Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2002; and Richardson, 1997, 2000 focus on various forms of autoethnography and personal experience methods. They use this method 'both to overcome the abstractions of a social science far gone with quantitative descriptions of human life and to capture those elements that make life conflictual, moving, problematic' (Lincoln and Guba, 2000, p. 179)".

To further support my view, I shared with Darlene a quote from Lincoln and Guba (2000) stating

> The guiding inquiry paradigm most appropriate to responsive evaluation is...the naturalistic, phenomenological or ethnographic paradigm. It will be seen that qualitative techniques are typically most appropriate to support this approach. There are times, however, when the issues and concerns voiced by audiences require information that is best generated by more conventional methods,

especially quantitative methods...In such cases, the responsive conventional evaluator will not shrink from the appropriate application (p. 169).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

"O.k., so I can see that you feel that a qualitative approach is most appropriate for this type of educational research, but what is the framing device that you are using to inform or guide your research? I mean, obviously, this is not following a standard scientific approach!"

I laughed. "No, you are right" I said. "My work is a relatively new form of qualitative research. As Lather (1991) wrote in *Getting Smart*, 'within educational research, while positivism retains its hegemony over practice, its long–lost theoretic hegemony has been disrupted and displaced by a newly hegemonic discourse of paradigm shifts. Interpretive and increasingly critical 'paradigms' are posited and articulated' (p.2). This is not only true in educational disciplines, but in others as well. In fact, 'in most disciplines the positivist philosophy that led to serious misunderstandings of science has been sharply criticized, opening up new horizons for interpretive investigations which focus on social, discursive and cultural forms of life, as opposed to a futile search for universal laws of human behaviour' (Brockmeier & Harre, 2001, p.40)".

I explained to Darlene how in the wake of these post-positivist changes, narrative and critical theories have especially attracted attention in the field of education. So,

while some academics may feel that finding my "self" is a rather "alternative" form of research, there are actually strong theoretical underpinnings for it.

"My research" I said, "is a combination of critical emancipatory theory and narrative theory, and I am hoping to use the term a critical narrative to define my theoretical framework".

"What's that - critical emancipatory theory?" Darlene asked.

"Well, Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) describe critical theory as a theory concerned with issues of power and justice, and the ways that the economy, race, class and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (p.90). While that may explain critical theory, it doesn't really describe emancipatory. From what I recall, Lather's book *Getting Smart* would have a good explanation for the term emancipatory. Have you read it?"

Darlene shook her head.

"Getting Smart offers an excellent introduction to critical emancipatory research. It is a book about structured relations of power in our society, and it describes the connections between critical research and liberatory educational pedagogy. Lather (1991) states: in our action and practice is our knowing. The central focus in her book is 'how research and teaching methods can better challenge the relations of dominance' (p. xv). Lather believes that postmodernism (which includes critical emancipation) can help us understand how people perpetuate relations of dominance. Postmodernism is a movement away from the positivist, science based paradigm. So,

for me, Darlene, this means that if my research is going to break-through for me personally, it has to embrace this method".

"So what is meant by a critical paradigm – do you have one – what is yours?"

"Again, according to Kincheloe and McLaren (2000), 'inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society...Research thus becomes a transformative endeavour unembarrassed by the label 'political' and unafraid to consummate a relationship with emancipatory consciousness' (Patton, 2002, p.131). Darlene, my research will illustrate some injustices I have personally experienced, and re-dressed through my own efforts."

Darlene was nodding, but still looking at me inquisitively. So, I continued.

"You know Darlene, I can give you an example of how reflective, narrative research - like the kind I am doing - works right now: the mere act of talking to you, reflecting on my experiences, helps me put into perspective just how my experiences have shaped me, my 'self' that teaches, and allows me to understand how that 'self' would approach teaching in a classroom. I will demonstrate in my thesis that my desire to ensure inclusion and equality in my classrooms stems from my experience as an employee who suffered from discrimination and injustice – real injustice which I had to make personal efforts to ensure was rectified". I shared with Darlene a quote that I found in Patton (2002):

> What gives critical theory its name - - what makes it critical - - is that it seeks not just to study and understand society but rather to critique and change society. Influenced by Marxism, informed by the presumption of the centrality of class conflict in understanding community and societal structures, and updated in the

> radical struggles of the 1960s, critical theory provides a framework - - both philosophy and methods - - for approaching research and evaluation as fundamentally and explicitly political, and as change-oriented forms of engagement (Patton, 2002, p. 131).

We discussed how interesting it is that so many things never stay the same, even some of the things thought of at one time or another to be absolutes.

"O.K., so what about the term 'emancipatory' that you described earlier? How does this fit into your research?"

"Emancipatory research is about trying to change situations and practices, to liberate those who are underrepresented or disenfranchised. So, critical emancipatory research is not just about studying and understanding society, but rather, critiquing or changing society. I want to examine my professional work situations, and critique society based on these experiences. I want others to find resonance through my experiences, and identify with my experiences through empathy."

I told Darlene how I felt that the term hegemony related to my experiences in the workplace. I pulled out a quote, showing how Apple (1996), conceptualizes hegemony.

> A process in which dominant groups come together to form a bloc and sustain leadership over subordinate groups. He further posits that because hegemony is so total, it is part of the daily, taken-for-granted actions that are part of everyday life, and not necessarily identified as oppressive, particularly by the oppressors, but also by the oppressed (who internalize) (Schwarz McCotter, 2001, p. 6).

I informed Darlene how I experienced an oppressive system in a workplace, and that it was my hope to name the ways in which dominant discursive norms influenced my life, my identity and, as I happily discovered, my teaching "self."

Thinking to myself, I remembered the workplace I was in, and it reminded me of Foucault's notion of power as explicated by Peters and Burbules:

> First, power is productive. It not only expresses the repressive, exclusionary force of a system's constraints but also creates new domains of knowledge and practice. Second, power is not located in any single control-center; it is dispersed throughout the social system in innumerable local seats of power. These seats interact with one another but do not form a unified system. Third, although it is intimately related to systems of knowledge, power is more than the play of signifiers and signifieds within such systems. It is ultimately the formative action of one body upon another (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p.63).

According to Peters and Burbules, we witness power in ruling institutions and authorities, and even in ways of speaking and thinking (p. 64). I witnessed and experienced power and ruling relations in an institution where I worked, and it is my hope to describe this ruling relation, and have my description influence myself and others, thereby helping myself and others.

"You suggest emancipation is about critiquing or changing power relations. I still don't quite understand how your personal story can change power relations. Do you believe that your research will essentially change the power structures that exist in workplaces?"

"No, no, I don't think for a minute that full emancipation from the power structures I experienced will take place. 'Emancipation is an ongoing process within educational experience, rather than the end result of critical reflection' (Schwandt, 2000, p. 203). I think this is the purpose of my thesis from a critical theory perspective. Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) as well note: 'as many critics have pointed out, no one is ever completely emancipated from the socio-political context that has produced him or her' (p.91). So no, I don't think it will essentially change existing power structures in any big way, but I certainly can change the way I think, and the way I teach, and how I deal with others around me."

I went on to explain to Darlene why changing the way I think and how I deal with others is of utmost importance to me. I know that having a transformative or emancipatory intent is by no means a guarantee of an emancipatory outcome, but this is not my main concern. When doing emancipatory research, we should be transforming ourselves, to ensure that we practice what we preach. As Lather (1991) states,

> Too often, we who do empirical research in the name of emancipatory politics fail to connect the way we do research to our theoretical and political commitments. Yet if critical inquirers are to develop a 'praxis of the present' we must practice in our empirical endeavours what we preach in our theoretical formulations. Research which encourages self and social understanding and change-enhancing action on the part of "developing progressive groups" requires research that allows us to reflect on how our value commitments insert themselves into our empirical work" (p. 80).

As such, I assume that more important than an emancipatory outcome, is the importance of developing skills of self-critique and reflexivity to keep me from becoming impositional myself.

I explained to Darlene that freeing the voice of the subject through emancipation, and the demand that the voice be heard, has been a recent interest in educational research. The idea of utilizing voice is supported in narrative and reflexive inquiry, engaged pedagogy and systematic sociological introspection by academics who support these methods of research such as Clandinin & Connelly, (2000), Cole & Knowles (2001), hooks (1994), Ellis & Bochner (2002) and Palmer (1998), among many others. The approaches of these researchers, while slightly different, share a common view that understanding inside the self who teaches and maintaining the well-being of the self, is equally as important as understanding the diverse influences outside of the self. They believe that the move inward, toward a better understanding of our selves, is a way of effecting sound change. They assume that in representing the lived experiences of educators and the practical knowledge that teachers have, in doing so, it can transform the self who teaches as well as others. As Ellis (2004) states, "increased self-understanding sometimes can provide a quicker and more successful route to social change than changing laws or other macropolitical structures, or espousing general cultural-political theories" (p.254), and Lather (1991) too suggests that emancipatory research has the capacity to liberate people and the self.

"Darlene", I explained, "I think my experiences in the workplace should be represented to demonstrate my practical knowledge about oppression in the workplace. At my office, my feelings were overridden by the power of my supervisors, and now, I think that my voice should be heard. I assume that by hearing it, and using it, I will be able to hear and understand the voices of others in similar or more oppressive situations."

"Aren't you worried that this work will help only you and no one else?"

I thought about Darlene's questions for a minute before answering, and considered what I had read in *Fields of Play*, by Richardson (1997). She states that, "academics are given the "story line" that the "I" should be suppressed in their writing, that they should accept homogenization and adopt the all-knowing, all-powerful voice of the academy. But contemporary philosophical thought raises problems that exceed and undermine that academic story line. We are always present in our texts, no matter how we try to suppress ourselves" (p. 2). Remembering this quote, gave me the support I needed to continue with my answer.

"That's a good question Darlene, and one I have grappled with myself, time and time again. While I may be at the centre of my research, I don't believe that my research is self-centred. For one, I am now comfortable with the fact that my 'self' does not need to be hidden in my research. I have come to learn that it is not important to maintain a critical 'distance' from my self to gain insight into the social forces that have made the very concept of my 'self' politicized. In fact, as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) state: 'many researchers now accept that they are not disinterested but are deeply invested in their studies, personally and profoundly'

(p.13). I too, feel deeply invested in my studies, and I feel supported by a number of scholars and academics. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state, 'we know that our texts have specific locations. We know that they represent – whether in some hidden way or openly – our baggage as individual social scientists' (p. 1058). Like others involved in this type of research, I don't worry about my 'objectivity' as a researcher. Rather, I care more about providing the reader with 'some powerful prepositional, tacit, intuitive, emotional historical, poetic and empathetic experience of the other' (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000, p.1058) through the text that I write".

I further explained how I also think my research is not self-indulgent, as it is as much for others as it is for myself. I also explained that I was aware that my autoethnography could end up being self-adorning if I am not careful. According to Ellis (1994), this can happen when we fail to be sufficiently self aware, or fail to take into account cultural constraints and possibilities, and then when this happens, what gets written is not useful for anyone - - not even the self (p. 34). I went on to justify my research by describing to Darlene that through my writing, I hope to gain self and social understanding, with the hope that this will affect my future as an educator. As well, I hope others will resonate with my experiences, and if so, my work will be transformational not only for my self, but for others as well. I thought about Lather's (1991) quote: "our efforts to generate less oppressive ways of knowing are both reproductive and transformative. While the never-ending self-critique called for by Foucault can be paralyzing, it also offers the hope of developing more effective social change practices" (p. 100). The way I see it, it is possible to be critical, even with my self at the centre.

"When you say 'self', that sounds to me like a modernist notion of a centred subject with will and soul, etc. Does that not contradict your use of postmodern philosophy?"

"Well, in the past, various scholars emphasized the idea of a self as having 'a distinct and specific individual identity, an unmistakable personal history and psychology' (Freeman & Brockmeier, 2001, p.77). This thinking, of the self as distinct and as a specific individual identity is what Foucault (1973) described as the "episteme of man" in the modern philosophy. In his book *The Order of Things,* Foucault anticipated the end of this way of thinking - - and I think he was right. Self study is a form accepted in the postmodern, and the postmodern represents a trend away from modernism, a movement that builds on but modifies its assumptions about legitimate knowledge."

I shared with Darlene how I have realized through my research that the postmodern movement has questioned the ideal of a universal, unchanging, unified self or subject which has full knowledge of and control over what it thinks, says and does. My research has shown the self is strongly influenced by its surrounding culture, changes within that culture, and is also fragmented like that culture. "To a degree, it is not we who think, speak, and act but the culture which thinks, speaks, and acts through us" (Beck, 2004, p. 5). To further support my findings, I shared with Darlene the following excerpt from Lincoln and Denzin (2000):

> The time of the fiction of a single true, authentic self has come and gone. Instead, we confront multiple identities: identities formed in and around our social locations, identities evoked in the field, identities created as a result of the

> interaction between our data and our selves, in and out of the field, experience-near and time-distant. Bridges to the self seem to be as many as bridges to our respondents, each of them eliciting new glimpses, new images of what our own possibilities might be, of how we might become, of how and in what ways we might come to know. The flowering of multiple paradigms and methods has been accompanied, to some extent by a flowering of possibilities for the human spirit. Just as the Enlightenment opened possibilities for lives of choice not dictated by theological doctrine, so this abandonment of a rigid Eurocentrism in our social sciences leaves open the potential for a new flowering of the human spirit, a new sense of the sacredness of the human spirit, human community, and human flourishing. Rather than viewing multiple identities as a mark of psychic disorder, we see in them possibilities and potential. The reflexive self is a self freed to choose, to enact, to perform new roles, new relationships. The multiple selves summoned by a more complex and committed social science possess richness beyond our ability to understand or tell at the moment (p. 1060)

"O.k. – I have to step back a bit…you mentioned narrative theory too. Where does this come in? Darlene questioned.

"You don't forget anything do you?!" I said jokingly, but thankful that she had remembered this. "Well, I intend to use autoethnography, a form of narrative method for my research. I chose narrative because as Bruner (2002) describes, 'self-making is a narrative art' (p. 64). He assumes self-making is both from the inside and the outside. This is why I want to write reflexively about my own memories, feelings and

ideas about my experiences, as well as the expectations that I experienced from the political and social cultures in which I have been immersed".

Darlene was looking at me but not saying anything. Perhaps she was wondering how narrative was going to tie in with critical emancipatory theory.

I continued: "Narrative theory ties in nicely as well with critical theory because it too, is critical in nature. According to Brockmeir & Carbaugh (2001) 'personal narrative studies resist grand narratives by adopting a view that marshals the diverse, historically concrete stories and experiences recounted by non-elite people against the version of reality allegedly sanctioned by mainstream social science and philosophy' (p. 9). This trend is associated with shifts in the human sciences that have been called the 'interpretive turn' or 'cultural turn' among others.

"Do you feel that narrative will address your emancipatory goals?"

"A personal narrative inquiry, which is what I intend to use, is referred to as an *evocative narrative*. I pulled out my research binder and showed her a quote by Ellis and Bochner (2000) regarding evocative narrative:

> the word evocative contrasts the expressive and dialogic goals of this work with the more traditional orientations of mainstream representational social science. Usually the author of an evocative narrative writes in the first person, making herself the object of research and thus breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subjects (p.744).

I stopped here in the middle of the quote to explain to Darlene that it is beneficial when a teacher can "know" in a personal way, and then share this with

their students. As hooks (1994) says in her writings: "It is productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material" (p. 21). I went on with the quotation from Ellis & Bochner:

> the story often focuses on a single case and thus breaches the traditional concerns of research from generalization across cases to generalization within a case; the mode of storytelling is akin to the novel or biography and thus fractures the boundaries that normally separate social science from literature; the accessibility and readability of the text repositions the reader as a coparticipant in dialogue and thus rejects the orthodox view of the reader as a passive receiver of knowledge; the disclosure of hidden details of private life highlights emotional experience and thus challenges the rational actor model of social performance (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744).

I continued by telling Darlene one thing I also find interesting about evocative narratives is that readers are encouraged to participate as researchers themselves, taking an active role interpreting the experiences described. The goal of narrative writing is to "write meaningfully and evocatively about topics that matter and may make a difference, to include sensory and emotional experience and to write from an ethic of care and concern"(Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 742).

"My literature review" I explained, "has uncovered that the use of narrative within education is a natural method to explore the discovery of the self that teaches, and in helping educate others about contextual influences. As Brockmeier and

Carbaugh (2001) state, 'narrative proves to be a supremely appropriate means for the exploration of the self or, more precisely, the construction of selves in cultural contexts of time and space' (p. 15). They would also agree narrative is an appropriate strategy in education because they believe it is a 'more humanistic approach to the study of diverse individuals and groups' (p. 9). Bruner (as cited in Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001) argues "the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and others organize our senses of who we are, who others are, and how we are to be related. How we learn to tell such stories, to understand and assess them, and to use particular ones in order to achieve particular goals, is what the culture of education is all about (p. 10). In fact, Richardson (1997) believes narrative is actually unavoidable in sociological writing. She states 'human values, sensibilities, and ambiguities continuously reassert themselves in 'plain' social science writing. Narrative cannot be suppressed within sociology because it is ineluctably tied to the human experience; trying to suppress it undermines the very foundations of the sociological enterprise' (p. 29).

I went on to describe how my literature review found that narrative method in research draws on the field of hermeneutic philosophy (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 19). According to Gadamer (1981), philosophical hermeneutics (and thus narrative method) is a quest toward understanding what it means to be human. I shared with Darlene a quote from Gadamer:

> Understanding means a growth in inner awareness, which as a new experience enters into the texture of our own mental experience. Understanding is an adventure, and like any other adventure is dangerous. But it is capable of

> contributing in a special way to the broadening of our human experiences, our self-knowledge, and our horizon, for everything understanding mediates is mediated along with ourselves. (Gadamer as cited in Schwandt, 2000, p. 196)

"So you see Darlene, I see narrative method as a way of understanding my self who teaches, a way of exploring myself and experiences holistically and how these experiences have impacted my ways of knowing as a teacher."

Darlene stood up and looked at her watch. I glanced at mine too, and realized that lunch was over.

"This has been very educational" Darlene said, "but I have to run now as I have a meeting this afternoon. Would it be possible for us to meet tomorrow morning over coffee so that you could describe what you intend to do for your overall design and methods of your thesis?"

"Oh, that would be great Darlene. I would really like to share my design with you ... it will help me pull together my thoughts and ideas. Do you want to meet in the boardroom early for coffee? I don't think it's booked for meetings?

"That works for me" Darlene said, "and I will be especially interested in hearing your defence of the validity of your approach! See you tomorrow morning!"

Validity?! I was struck with panic. I think I have some reading to do tonight, I thought to myself!

"See you tomorrow" I blithely replied, "and thanks again for your help".

That night, I stayed up late, reading and researching about using autoethnography as my overall design, and coming up with a defence of the validity of my approach. My efforts paid off and I was ready and eager to meet Darlene's challenges the following morning.

On my way to work, I stopped to pick up a coffee for each of us. It's the least I could do I thought to myself, given the time and effort that Darlene is giving to me. When I got to work, Darlene was already in the boardroom.

We greeted one another and chatted for a few moments about the grey weather, and our plans for the upcoming weekend. Then, we began.

"I took the liberty of booking the boardroom for an hour this morning" Darlene remarked, "I hope that gives us enough time". She stopped to sip at her coffee. "I was thinking last evening that you mentioned using autoethnography as your overall design, or method, but I am not really familiar with the approach. Could you tell me about it?"

"Sure!" I exclaimed.

I was glad to have a chance to describe this approach, not only to share with Darlene, but also to organize my own thoughts. I started describing how experimental writing in research has been on the rise. Some of the writing is based on research work and some of these writings are highly reflexive and insightful interpretations. I explained that there are many forms of experimental writing, and that autoethnography is just one such form. I then had to think back to what I had researched on autoethnography, in order to provide Darlene with a good definition of the term.

Just when I was about to continue, there was a knock on the door. It was our supervisor.

"Oh, excuse me" he said, "I didn't realize anyone was using the boardroom".

"That's alright," Darlene replied "but I have booked it, for the next hour".

Our supervisor looked around the room and looked at us both, and then at his watch. "I apologize for doing this ladies, but I have an important meeting with three of the directors from other departments ... would you mind holding your meeting in another location?"

Darlene and I glanced at each other. We both knew that he didn't have this room booked, and yet, as always, he had the authority to ask us to move to another location, even given the fact that we reserved the space in advance. We were annoyed, but we didn't let it show.

"Not a problem," I said and Darlene and I both smiled. We gathered our things and moved again to the lunchroom where we sprawled my research on the kitchen table. Neither of us discussed further having to leave the room - - it was just a given fact that if the supervisor wanted the room, that his meetings were perceived to be more important than ours, so we should move.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Darlene and I continued our conversation. I told her that according to Ellis and Bochner (2000), David Hayano coined the term autoethnography in 1979. From their perspective, it seems that autoethnography is synonymous with many terms such

as personal narratives, narratives of the self, lived experience, evocative narrative and autobiographical ethnography (p. 740). The method itself, as I explained, is associated with ethnography. I described how *ethnography*, is often done to "gain an understanding of the symbolic meanings attached to the patterns of social interactions of individuals within a particular cultural group" (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 17), but that autoethnography is different.

"So, how is it different?" Darlene asked.

"Well, in autoethnography, 'the research text is the story, complete (but open) in itself, largely free of academic jargon and abstracted theory. The authors privilege stories over analysis, allowing and encouraging alternative readings and multiple interpretations. They ask their readers to feel the truth of their stories and to become co-participants engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually' (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 745). Consequently, autoethnography locates the personal and emotional experiences of the researcher (self) as the subject in a context that relates those experiences to larger social issues. So, as Oleson (2000) states, 'the personal, biographical, political and social are interwoven' (p. 232). What I wish to do with autoethnography then, is to explore the interweaving of the social and political in my 'everyday' life, and document how it impacted me and influenced me in a transformational way and in my way of knowing as a teacher.

"Can you please explain some more how you feel your personal stories can help you and the readers of your thesis better understand larger social issues?"

"Sure. According to Riessman (2002), what we call "personal troubles" are located in particular times and places. Individuals' narratives about their troubles are

works of history as much as they are about individuals, the social spaces they inhabit, and the societies they live in. We can also locate narratives in the social relations of production, that is, in their class, institutional, and interactional contexts' (p. 6).

"Do you have to write about your personal troubles?"

"No, I don't. But, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) believe, it is often the personal troubles that are most often written about. Bochner says 'it's because social science from the beginning has been grounded in understanding deviance, evil, dysfunction, mental illness, abuse and abnormal behaviour' (Ellis, 2004, p.43). Ellis states 'happiness and the mundane don't always make a good plot, which works better with a buildup of tension and usually some resolution' (p. 43)."

"Why do researchers such as yourself find autoethnography so appealing?" Darlene asked.

Before answering, I thought back to a confession of Richardson's in her book *Fields of Play*. She stated,

> I have a confession to make. For thirty years, I have yawned my way through numerous supposedly exemplary qualitative studies. Countless numbers of texts have I abandoned half-read, half-scanned. I'll order a new book with great anticipation – the topic is one I'm interested in, the author is someone I want to read – only to find the text boring. Recently, I've been "coming out" to colleagues and students about my secret displeasure with much of qualitative writing only to find a community of like-minded discontents" (p. 87)

I could resonate with Richardson when I read this, because I too have felt discontent with qualitative writing. I found traditional qualitative research to be boring and was pleased to learn in the master of education courses that there are other approaches to writing and presenting research that are much more appealing to me such as personal writing and autoethnography. After thinking back about Richardson's quote, I felt I could better answer Darlene's question as to why myself and others find these methods appealing.

I began first by explaining to Darlene I believe it is because recently, personal writing has become increasingly popular. "According to Ellis and Bochner (2000)" I said, "there is 'ample evidence of a burgeoning interest among diverse fields of social science in the genres of personal narrative and autoethnography' (p. 733). I don't exactly know why other researchers find it appealing, but for me, I find personal writing appealing because it allows me to understand how the self connects the inner with the outer. I chose to use autoethnography as my research method because according to Cole and Knowles (2001), *autoethnography* starts with the self, in order to explore the self within broader socio-cultural contexts. I chose this method over *autobiography* for example, because the sole purpose of autobiography, according to Cole and Knowles, is for self-understanding (p.16), and I wish to go beyond that. I also want to see how my experiences have, will and do influence my current and future actions and will help me understand larger socio-cultural relations of power. This is not to say those who write using the method of autobiography are only writing for the purpose of self-understanding. Indeed several writers have identified their writing as being autobiographical yet have clearly identified in their writing they wish

to understand their self in relation to others and dominant social practices. For example, Brookes (1992) identifies her book *Feminist Pedagogy* as having an autobiographical approach. Yet, her research and writing clearly illustrate she is interested in much more than a personal understanding. The fact is, the term autoethnography is a relatively new term, and had it been defined earlier, perhaps some writers would have chosen to use that term instead of autobiography. I am not suggesting autoethnography is a better way to write than autobiography in terms of understanding self and others - - it is just the method and term I have chosen, to avoid confusion and to define my work. I identify with the definition of autoethnography because it is reflexive in nature, which is key in critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy acknowledges harmony. It is about knowing and understanding an inner self, but also, is a process of being in harmony with the outer self. This may as well be a reason why autoethnography is becoming more and more appealing."

I discussed with Darlene that autoethnography is appealing to me, and perhaps to others as well, because it seems to come quite naturally to me. I can relate to it because it is part of my everyday way of life, and I know how to tell and listen to narratives. As stated by Richardson (1997),

> Narrative is everywhere; it is present in myth, fable, short story, epic, history, tragedy, comedy, painting, dance, stained glass windows, cinema, social histories, fairy tales, novels, science schema, comic strips, conversation and journal articles. Children everywhere learn how to listen to and tell stories at very early ages. Roland Barthes comments, "the narratives of the world are without number...[T]he narrative is present at all times, in all places, in all

societies: the history of narrative begins with the history of [hu]man kind; there does not exist, and never has existed, a people without narratives" (p. 27).

I further explained to Darlene that writers such as Riessman (2002) and Bullough and Pinnegar (2001), have identified trends to account for the popularity of personal narratives. Riessman identifies four contemporary U.S. movements:

1) The narrative turn in the human sciences away from positivist modes of inquiry;
2) The memoir boom in literature and popular culture;
3) The new identity movements – emancipation efforts of people of colour, women, gays and lesbians and other marginalized groups; and
4) The burgeoning therapeutic culture – exploration of personal life in therapies of various kinds" (p. 2)

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) feel the movement is the result of the following trends and developments in educational research:

- The movement toward acknowledging that who a researcher is, is central to what a researcher does;
- The growth in understanding that one always teaches the self, and that seeking the roots of self-understanding can achieve an understanding in education; and

- Growing involvement of international researchers in education bringing intellectual traditions, mostly tapping into the humanities rather than social sciences (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

VALIDITY AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION

"How do you judge the quality of such a non-traditional research approach? I mean, just how do you prove that this kind of research is credible? How will you establish and defend your results?"

"Darlene, I know this might be difficult to swallow for a person with roots in traditional research like you, but with autoethnography the criteria to judge the quality goes beyond the traditional criteria of reliability, validity and generalizability."

"Why would these criteria not apply?" Darlene asked.

"These criteria do not apply," I explained, "because it is important not to 'squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research' (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p. 184). Cole and Knowles (2004) are of the same view, and they suggest qualitative research is 'contrary to traditional scientific inquiry conducted under strictly controlled conditions and with emphasis on adherence to a priori design and analysis instrumentation' (p. 104) and others, such as Riessman (1993) and Mishler (1990) would agree. These authors and scholars are of the opinion the prevailing concepts of verification for establishing validity are irrelevant to qualitative research such as narrative inquiry or autoethnography, because they 'rely on realist assumptions and consequently are largely irrelevant to narrative studies' (Riessman, 1993, p.64). They believe researchers who employ

more 'alternative' models, such as narrative inquiry, autoethnography, reflexive research and the like, are utilizing models based on new emerging design principles, and thus feel validity must be reconceptualized.

Even while I spoke, I was bothered by my use of the term 'alternative' to describe autoethnography, although it was helping me get the point across to Darlene. It's not that I was the only one to label it as alternative. In fact, over the past decade or more, the new ethnographic forms such as autoethnographies have been labelled as 'experimental', 'alternative' or as 'Creative Analytic Practice' (Richardson, 2000). I decided to explain myself to Darlene.

"You know Darlene, just before I go on, I just want to clarify my use of the term 'alternative'. Autoethnography, while I say alternative, is not at all alternative or experimental. In fact, it is considered to be a very valid representation of the social. Richardson (1997) believes that into the foreseeable future, ethnographies such as this 'may indeed be the most valid and desirable representations, for they invite people in; they open spaces for thinking about the social that elude us now' (p. 230)".

"O.k., that's fine, I understand what you mean by your description."

Relieved, I nodded, and went on to explain how many of the researchers who use these "alternative" models, believe that these approaches are unlike traditional research in the sense that they are not linear, sequential processes. Rather, they are more cyclical, requiring ongoing reflection, analysis and responsiveness in the research process (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 104). Accordingly, "it is apparent that validation in narrative studies cannot be reduced to a set of formal rules or

standardized technical procedures" (Riessman, 1993, p. 68) and that the prevailing concepts for establishing validity, reliability, and generalizability are irrelevant to narrative studies.

Researchers are coming up with new ways of imagining validity in their work. Richardson (1997) proposes that validity for postmodernist texts is not the triangle (a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object), but rather a crystal. She explains crystals grow, change, and alter but they are not amorphous. "Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colours, patterns, arrays, casting off in different directions. What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization" (p. 92).

Lather "proposes counter-practices of authority that rupture validity as a 'regime of truth' and lead to a critical political agenda" (Lather as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 124). According to Oleson (2000), Lather's transgressive validity is the most completely worked-out feminist model, one that calls for a subversive move in a feminist deconstructionist mode.

> To assure capturing differences but within a transformative space that can lead to a critical political agenda, Lather rests transgressive validity on four subtypes, here highly condensed: (a) iconic validity, which attempts to address the problems in respresentation; (b) paralogical validity, which seeks out differences, oppositions, uncertainties; (c) rhizomatic validity, which counters authority with multiple sites; and (d) voluptuous validity, which deliberately seeks excess and authority through self-engagement and reflexivity (p. 231).

Kvale suggests postmodern notions see validity as a social construction, and that three views of validity follow from this position:

1) validity can be seen as an expression of craftsmanship (here the quality of interpretive work is assessed);
2) validity is a form of communication, a dialogue, and a conversation between the researcher and the world; and
3) validity is a form of pragmatic action in the world, hence a work is judged by the effects it produces in the world (Kvale as cited in Lincoln & Bochner, 2003, p. 232).

Other authors believe more in validity evoking reader response . They suggest that in the writing, the proof or validation is in the story that has been written, and how the story looks to our mind's eye. It is their belief that when looking for proof, we need to look to whether the stories that have been told to "satisfy your sense of style and craftsmanship, whether you believe them, and whether they appeal to your heart. " (Sandelowski as cited in Clough, 2002, p. 18) Ellis (2004) assumes with narratives, generalizability is tested by readers, because it is they who determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. "Readers provide theoretical validation by comparing their lives to ours, by thinking about how our lives are similar and different and the reasons why" (p. 195). To these authors, their work is considered valid if their stories evoke reader response, open up the possibility of dialogue, help the reader change themselves or institutions, promote

social justice, think through moral dilemmas or better understand their own experiences and research encounters (p.195).

So, in light of all of this research, I too, believe that new validity criteria are required for considering autoethnographic research in education. It would be possible to use any one of these lists of criteria to evaluate my thesis. Yet, Bochner (2002), in his article *Criteria Against Ourselves*, argues the conflicts over which criteria to apply in autoethnography, usually boil down to personal choice, and that it may be better to apply personal standards rather than adhering to a list of "criteria", because criteria can contain our freedom to write and limit our possibilities as researchers (pp. 257-265).

As such, rather than using solely generated criteria of validity or believability from any of the authors I researched, the challenge for me was to generate, substantiate and argue for criteria that are valid for what my thesis is trying to do, and for the community of practice in which it is located. The list of criteria that I developed is as follows:

1. Have a researcher's fingerprint;
2. Not contain absolute truths;
3. Speak to the heart of social consciousness;
4. Be persuasive;
5. Trace the social construction of knowledge;
6. Be transformational;
7. Have aesthetic merit;

8. Be of therapeutic or personal value;
9. Contain a sense of the unknown;
10. Be reflexive and non-linear;
11. Tell something interesting;
12. Be of importance to educators; and
13. Have a critical perspective.

I followed by sharing with Darlene a written description of the "criteria" I had developed, knowing that a quantitative researcher like herself would need some convincing. As she read to herself, I read along with her what I had written:

Criteria #1: Researcher's Fingerprint

According to Knowles (2004), the work we do as researchers must have intentionality. In our research and our findings, it should be evident who is the researcher, and that they are passionately involved in the research.

I suggest that my researchers fingerprint will be quite evident to the reader. The fact that I am proposing to write letters, to my self, means that I will be writing directly, from the source of my own personal experiences. As such, this will implicate my personal fingerprint in the final product.

Criteria #2: Absence of Absolute Truths

My writing will make it clear to the reader that it contains no absolute truths. Critical narratives are part of the postmodern movement and my writing should

reflect the era as such. My perspective is based on my research and readings of scholars and academics such as Kvale (1995), Lather (1991) and Lincoln and Denzin (2000) among others, who would agree that the modernist belief in a "master," "grand," or "meta" narrative, or an absolute God was dissolved with the movement to the postmodern. This essentially means that "grand narratives" described as "overarching philosophies of history like the Enlightenment story of the gradual but steady progress of reason and freedom" (Lather, 1991, p. 5) have been recognized as oppressive.

The postmodern is a movement of critical discourses that disrupts the "regimes of truth". In the postmodern era, "there is a focus on interpretation and negotiation of the meaning of the lived world. Knowledge is not a matter of interaction with nonhuman reality, but of communication between persons" (Kvale, 1995, p. 306). To me, it is a more humanistic view. Lincoln and Denzin (2000) state the "postmodern era is defined, in part, by the belief that there has been no single umbrella in the history of the world that might incorporate and represent fairly the dreams, aspirations and experiences of all people" (p.1056). According to Richardson (1997), "poststructuralism frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everyone. Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of "science writing" on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche" (p. 89). Lather (1991) suggests the postmodern movement, "sees reality as a text, subject to multiple interpretations, multiple readings and multiple uses" (vii).

Because we live in such a diverse world, where diverse ways of knowing and telling exist side by side, our research I assume should respect this. As eluded to, "the core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the "right" or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge" (Richardson, 1997, p. 228). The postmodern then, recognizes the limitations of the researcher, allows us to have some understanding of what might be important, without having to claim big "T" truths, as described by Knowles (2004).

The purpose of my research is to gain an understanding of my identity, and in doing so, gain an understanding of the ways in which I wish to practice teaching. I cannot gain an understanding of everything there is to know about my self or students, nor can I understand everything there is to know about oppressive situations that they may be in. I can however begin to understand what may be important.

Criteria #3: Speaking to Social Consciousness

For my writing to be considered valid, I think it should not be overly self indulgent and it should move beyond personal introspection to show the wider social and cultural context of self creation - - that it make a substantive contribution. According to scholars such as Knowles (2004) and Richardson (2000), qualitative educational research in the postmodern era should contribute somehow to understanding the problems of humanity, schools or kids. In the words of Richardson, "Research such as this should have a substantive contribution, and the

piece should contribute to our understanding of social life (Richardson, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 87).

When I read *Narratives and Fictions in Educational Research* by Clough (2002), I resonated with his writing when he stated "narrative is useful only to the extent that it opens up (to its audiences) a deeper view of life in familiar contexts: it can make the familiar strange, and the strange familiar" (p. 8). This is what I hope to do with my writing. I hope that my readers may be able to connect my experiences to something that is going on in their life or in the life of someone they know, and then also be able to gain a better understanding of social and cultural life from that story. Indeed, as Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) state: "Part of what makes education-related biographical writing attractive to its readers is the promise of recognition and connection. A space is formed for readers' experience that throws light on one's self and one's connections to others" (p.16).

Criteria #4: Persuasiveness

Readers of autoethnographic research, such as mine, cannot go searching for the presence of absolute truth in the research. Rather, they must embrace the narrative truth. What this means for my research, is that the experiences I depict, need to become believable to the reader. As such, my writing must be persuasive in order to be believable. According to Maclure (2003), "texts are artful, and they succeed when they persuade us that some state of affairs, proposition or argument is as it appears to be" (p. 80).

To write persuasively is not a simply task. Riessman (1993) suggests persuasiveness "ultimately rests on the rhetoric of writing – on literary practices – and reader response" (p. 66). Riessman (1993) assumes to be persuasive, "success depends on the analyst's capacity to invite, compel, stimulate or delight the audience" (p. 66). Ellis (2004) believes, "validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible" (p. 124). So, to be truthful, in my research, my stories must convey my emotional experience, and capture readers. Relaying only facts in my thesis would not accomplish this. As Ellis (2004) explains "Fidelity to the facts is no free pass to the reader's attention" (p.123).

Criteria #5: Social Construction of Knowledge

In a postmodern era, since the beliefs in grand narratives, an absolute God, or an objective reality have dissolved, it is now believed that the concept of knowledge is replaced with a social construction of reality (Kvale, 1995, p. 306). From this perspective, it is assumed a particular study is valid if it can become the basis for the work of others. Mishler (1990), Riessman (1993) and Kvale (1995) argue that valid knowledge claims are established when a community of scientists come to view the results of a study as significantly trustworthy, and then use that study as a basis for their own work. Mishler is of the opinion "skilled research is a craft, and like any craft, it is learned by apprenticeship to competent researchers, by hands-on experience and by continual practice" (p. 422).

The fact my research is constructed as an autoethnography, means that the reader must participate in the search for answers as they read. Truth then, is constituted through a dialogue between my writing and the reader. Valid knowledge will hopefully then emerge as different interpretations are discussed among readers, or even with myself, the author. As well, it is my hope that a community of researchers will come to view my research as significant, and perhaps use it as a basis for their own work. It this occurs, then my research will succeed as being somewhat of a helpful contribution in academic research.

Criteria #6: Transformative

It is assumed autoethnographic work should have consequences - - the potential to be transformational (in theory and practice) for both the writer, and the reader (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001; Knowles, 2004). This type of work should generate new questions such as: How does this affect me? Does it move me to write? To act?

As Ellis and Bochner (2000) describe, the work of autoethnography can "make a life that sometimes seems to be falling apart, come together again, by retelling and restorying the events of one's life" (p. 746). As they state, the question is not, "Does my story reflect my past accurately?" as if I were holding a mirror to my past. Rather, I must ask "What are the consequences my story produces? What kind of person does it shape me into? What new possibilities does it introduce for living my life?" (p. 746).

Because my thesis is closely tied to personal dialogue, I think it is more self-transformative than politically or socially transformative. However, the two are linked. If I can transform myself, as a teacher, then my influence on others, will be through my self who is transformed, thus having an influence on others. Further, if other educators read my thesis, then perhaps they will connect some of my experiences to their own or to social situations, and will recognize areas that need to change both in and out of the classroom. In this way, social transformation occurs and the personal becomes political. It is the goal of my research to become significant to the reader in that they will be able to resonate with my experiences, allowing them to make connections between their life and the political and social structures in which they live their own lives.

Criteria #7: Aesthetic Merit

In autoethnography, it is important to engage and sustain the readers' attention and curiosity and to stir them both intellectually and emotionally in order to appeal and be persuasive. It is important to create a "good" read.

Scholars such as Knowles (2004), Ellis and Bochner (2000) and Richardson (1997, 2000) discuss the importance of aesthetic merit in autoethnographic writing. They claim it is important to succeed aesthetically in order for the text to be satisfying, interesting and not boring (Patton, 2002).

Lather (1991) would concur as she assumes while we often conceal our research behind "masks of objectivity and fact" (p. 91), it is widely believed

aesthetically appealing work could "enlarge the appeal, understandability and possibly even the authenticity of empirical work" (p. 91).

As such, for my research to be valid, to capture the readers' attention by being satisfying and interesting, it needs to have aesthetic merit. When presenting my research, I am proposing to do so in the form of letters. The letters will be written based on personal experiences. These letters will be written from two "voices" (both being myself, which will then together form a "conversation", using Richardson's (2000) technique of writing as inquiry. After the inquiry takes place, these letters will then be analyzed through my voice as an academic writer and researcher.

I chose letter writing because I feel it will have aesthetic merit, but I also believe it is purposeful for my research. According to Brookes (1992), "letter writing is a useful way of organizing academic work" (p.128). When we write letters, we "try to give an account of ourselves, make meaning of our experiences, and attempt to establish and maintain relationships among ourselves, our experience and the experience of others" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000, p.106). Brookes (1992) argues the importance of writing from an autobiographical or autoethnographic perspective.

> These forms are important because they enable writers to regard and address readers from the perspective of responsibility and care rather than the detachment most commonly encouraged in academe. Importantly too, these methods may be used to teach students to become authorities of their own perspectives. This learning is key to understanding ideology as a social construct" (p. 128).

I too believe in the importance of writing with aesthetic merit. In my perspective, research using this style of writing, can enlarge the interest and appeal of the research, as well as the understandability, thus reaching a wider audience.

Criteria #8: Therapeutic or Personal Value

Critics sometimes argue against evocative narrative and authoethnography because of its therapeutic nature. Yet, according to Ellis and Bochner (2000) research that functions as self-discovery for the author as well as for those who read it, is social science with a moral centre and heart. They assume we don't need to be ashamed of our work if it has therapeutic or personal value (p. 746). In fact, they suggest most often in autoethnography, while therapeutic value is not the main objective or purpose of the research, it is often a useful result of writing using this method (p. 754). As Brookes (1992) states, "It involves making public the events of our lives, wriggling free of the constraints of purely private and individual experiences. From a state of modest insignificance we enter a space in which we can take our-selves seriously" (p. 129). I agree that while it is not the main objective of my research, knowing my research will have personal value is very important to me. The very fact that I am writing about identity is an indication I am seeking personal value in my research from the outset. If I feel at the end of my thesis that my research and writing was therapeutic to me and of personal value to my self, then I will have accomplished part of what I set out to do in this research.

Criteria #9: Contain a Sense of the Unknown

Narrative texts are different from scientific texts, in the sense that they refuse the temptation to explain. As Riessman (1993) suggests, narratives "do not speak for themselves" (p. 22). Ellis and Bochner (2000) concur as they state, "Evocative stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response. They long to be used rather than analyzed; to be told and retold rather than undebatable conclusions; and to substitute the companionship of intimate detail for the loneliness of abstracted facts (p. 744). Further, Bruner (2002) assumes a great narrative is "deeply about plight, about the road rather than about the inn to which it leads" (p. 20), meaning that we are drawn to narrative because of the unknown, because of the hidden story.

As such, it is the goal of this research to retain a sense of mystery so everything is not explained. I will attempt to refrain from giving answers and meaning so as to resist explaining everything to my readers from the outset.

Criteria #10: Reflexive, Non-Linear Quality

This criteria is taken from Cole and Knowles' (2000) notion of a prism for reflexivity. Cole and Knowles explain how mirrors and transparent prisms reflect and refract light, thus changing the direction in which light rays travel, sometimes even bending them back on themselves, causing them to move in directions opposite from their original path (p. 2). Reflexive inquiry is similar in the sense that text can have multiple inner-connecting centres and can represent a de-centered, inter-related network of ideas and emotions and experiences. They suggest "in a reflexive stance, making sense of both prior and current educational experiences within the context of

present practice may shed new, perhaps brighter, light on understandings of teaching" (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p.3).

By virtue of the fact this research is an autoethnography, Ellis and Bochner would assume I will meet this criteria. They state,

> Autoethnography refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze: First they look through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition (Ellis & Bochner as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 38).

The letters written in this research will be written reflexively, and they will be analyzed through a socio-critical lens. While I am writing, I will be creating an image of my self and I will also be looking at experiences and analyzing them through a socio-political lens. I will be theorizing or elaborating my self and then taking a critical look at my experiences in the final analysis.

Criteria #11: Must be Tellable

According to Bruner (2002), the only requirement imposed by having to tell a life story is that one tell something interesting. "What makes for something "interesting" is invariably a "theory" or "story" that runs counter to expectancy or produces an outcome counter to expectancy" (p. 30).

I will tell stories about my self that I hope will be of interest to the reader. I will tell stories that may come as a surprise to the reader, stories that my readers may not suspect, but stories which have helped me, and which may help others, shed light on educational pedagogy.

Criteria #12: Issues of Importance to Educators

According to many scholars and academics, for autobiography, self-study or autoethnography to be powerful in the field of education, there must be evidence of the writer engaged in issues that are central to teaching or teacher education (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001; Knowles, 2004). As Knowles discussed in a presentation to University of Prince Edward Island Master of Education students, on March 22, 2004, the study must be deeper than life itself. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) suggest, this deeper truth can be found when biography and history are successfully met - - the connection of a particular finding or moment to a larger frame of shared experience (p. 17).

In my analysis of the letters, I will tie my experiences to educational pedagogy, to illustrate how my ways of knowing have and will influence my self who teaches.

Criteria #13: Critical Perspective

I suggest it is important to analyze my narrative from a critical perspective, for the sheer fact that my narrative is an autoethnography. According to Richardson (2000), "autoethnographies are highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural" (p. 231). An evocative narrative, which is the way I plan to write, is a form of autoethnography. As Richardson further states, evocative representations "display interpretive frameworks that demand analysis of themselves as cultural products and as methods for rendering the social" (p. 231).

As such, I will analyze my experiences from a critical, socio-cultural perspective. This means that in my analysis I will be searching for injustice because according to Patton (2002) "inquiry that aspires to the name critical must be connected to an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society" (p. 131). Thus, in my analysis, I will seek not simply to understand if an injustice has taken place, but also to critique it. Wink (2000) uses a prism as analogous to critical pedagogy. She explains "a prism that reflects the complexities of the interactions between teaching and learning. It highlights some of the hidden subtleties that may have escaped our view previously. It enables us to see more widely and more deeply"(p.30), it enables us to "give us the courage to say what we have lived" (p.8), and it "forces us to see the broad social, historical, cultural, and political context of teaching and learning" (p.44). From her perspective, critical pedagogy gives us the courage to say what we see, and it is grounded in justice, equity and moral mandates

(p.44). In my analysis, I will write what I see, based on my own personal experiences.

"So, to what data will you be applying such non-traditional criteria?"

"Well" I said, "by way of background, lets reflect upon the fact that the criteria I have outlined open up the possibility of new writing formats. You may not be aware, but creative writing is quite acceptable in educational research. Eisner (1996), who was a former president of the American Educational Research Association, has argued that a novel could be a legitimate form of research in social science or education (Patton, 2002, p. 87).

"A novel?! Are you proposing to write a novel for your masters thesis?" Darlene asked in dismay.

"No, I am not proposing to write a novel, although others most certainly have, and have succeeded. My thesis advisor for example, wrote a novel for her Philosophy Doctorate (Ph.D) in Education. However, I am proposing that the presentation of my thesis be in the form of a personal dialogue, in the form of letters as I indicated in my list of criteria".

"Are you sure that letters will constitute research?"

"My letters will be a conversation between two "characters" (Caroline and Beth) each of whom are voices of my self. The conversation will take place between the two to try to help each self relive and describe their recollection of emotional experiences. The experiences of each of these "selves" will constitute the database.

The challenge in this research will be to write in an authentic voice so that my work seems real. Richardson (2000) refers to what she calls "expression of a reality" in this type of work, and indicates that the text must embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived experience and that if must seem 'true' or a credible account (Patton, 2002, p. 88).

"Writing letters shouldn't be too difficult – are you using that way of writing because it would be easier or faster than perhaps interviewing?"

"On the contrary Darlene. According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnographic writing is amazingly difficult to do, and that most people do not write well enough to carry it off. They indicate that the writer must be quite introspective about their feelings or experiences. They state 'the self questioning autoethnography demands is extremely difficult' (p. 738). Clough (2000) who wrote *Narratives and Fiction in Educational Research* as well agrees this is difficult work. He assumes 'the freedom from imposed structural frameworks of academic tradition does not mean freedom from every dilemma' (p. 10). Richardson (1994) as well explains the freedom to experiment with textual form, does not necessarily guarantee a good product either. She suggests 'the opportunities for writing worthy texts – books and articles that are a 'good' read – are multiple, exciting and demanding. But the work is harder. The guarantees are few. There is a lot more for us to think about' (Richardson as cited in Clough, 2002, p.7). While these researchers claim the work is harder, (and I agree!) I enjoy the challenges, and this is one of the reasons I have chosen this for my research. As Clough indicates, 'everyone at some time in their life, must choose whether to stay with a ready-made world that may be safe but which

is also limiting, or to push forward, often past the frontiers of common-sense, into a personal place, unknown and untried' (p. 11). To answer your questions, I am interested in trying out something new Darlene – not something easier. For me this is a personal challenge!"

"If your own experience is your data, how will you accurately portray the facts?"

"The truth is, we can never really capture our experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). If my goal was to do scientific research, then I might be more focused on facts. However, the purpose of this thesis is to convey the meanings I have attached to those experiences."

I shared with Darlene a quote from Riessman's book *Narrative Analysis* which was about truth in narrative:

> When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don't reveal the past "as it actually was," aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences...Unlike the Truth of the scientific idea., the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor are they self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them. Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters "outside" the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a

part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them (Personal Narratives Group as cited in Riessman, 1993, p.22).

"The fact is Darlene, narratives themselves are interpretive, and in turn, require interpretation. The reader must look for trustworthiness, rather than truth, and trustworthiness can come through strategies such as persuasion which I outlined in my criteria for validity".

"How can you possibly remember all the dialogue and details now?"

"Clandinin and Connelly refer to Dewey's book *Experience and Education* when they talk about the study of experience. They seem to say that the study of experience is the study of life. As well, they write about the researcher's presence through the concept of multiple selves such as researcher, teacher, woman, etc. The research I am proposing to do, which is reflexive in nature, will not be about making such clear distinctions in my selves. My multiple selves will merge and build upon each other in this research. The past, the present and, I suppose, the future will intersect and overlap in non-linear ways. I will use a process of emotional recall in which I will imagine being in the past, both emotionally and physically. Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to this process as *systematic sociologic introspection*".

"Systematic what?!" Darlene interjected.

"Systematic sociological introspection" I laughed. This means

By involving oneself in a sustained exploration of experiences and self-knowledge, you can revisit the scenes of your past emotionally in order to remember other details from which you can analyze the experiences from a

> larger context - from a cultural and critical perspective. The key once you have moved around the experience, is to analyze your thoughts and feelings as socially constructed processes (p. 752).

Ellis describes the process as follows: 'I start with my personal life. I pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts and emotions. I use what I call systematic sociological introspection and emotional recall to try to understand an experience I've lived through. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life' (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.737). This is what I hope to achieve too. Also, I want to take those experiences and politicize them, the everyday - - make my experiences observable in ways that I didn't see before. I will do this in my analysis of my experiences. Hopefully in the end, the research will turn my everyday work experiences into possible catalysts for action for me or for others.

I stopped and Darlene turned to me.

"Wow – this is going to really interesting research! Now that I understand your topic, the significance of your study and the research method you propose to use, I can't wait to read your research and your letters! Not only am I interested to see if you can apply the criteria you have outlined to your research, but also I am also interested in learning through your experiences. This will be a first for me in terms of reading research of this kind, but I am REALLY looking forward to it!"

"Oh Darlene, that's just great! I thought when we initially started our conversation that you would have been hesitant to read my research, so I am pleased that you have changed your mind!"

"Well, it's thanks to you" Darlene said, "for providing me with so much detailed information and such a concise description of your work, theoretical framework and research methods. You have really enlightened me over the past couple of days. In fact, I would be interested in reading more about this method of research."

"I'll give you my list of references" I said, as it is a good start, and anything I come across that I feel may be of interest to you, I'll pass along!"

"That would be great" Darlene replied.

Just then Darlene's cell phone rang. She answered, and with an apologetic smile and wave, she left the lunchroom. I was relieved to actually have a moment to myself to collect my thoughts. As I gathered my files, I thought about the tremendous amount of research that I had done to date. Talking it over with Darlene was rewarding as it allowed me to summarize my knowledge in ways that I had not done before. It was a great feeling knowing that this part of my research was behind me, and that now, a new challenge lay ahead. Where am I going to start? I got up, and went back to my desk. I'll start tomorrow, I thought, and I put my files away and eased comfortably into the chair at my desk. Now, back to work!

PART TWO – DATA
"Stories Tell"

From: Smith, Beth [bsmith@yahoo.ca]

To: Ellis, Caroline[Ellis@univ.ca]

Subject: Help!

Dear Caroline:

Your critical pedagogy course last spring was one of the most powerful courses I have ever experienced. Not only for the course itself, but for how it has made me think about myself and my future career as a teacher.

In particular, you mentioned the work of bell hooks (1994) in our class, and we discussed her view that "It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material" (p. 21). Throughout the course, you made every attempt to link our academic discussions to your experiences. But somehow, and I'm not sure why, I resisted your suggestions to make those links and connections.

This has bothered me tremendously because I now think, as a result of your class, that the learning and the risks in class need to be reciprocal, as this is how we can better ensure a truly 'critical

pedagogy'.

So, I am in desperate need of telling you about a HORRIBLE experience that I experienced in my former workplace that quite possibly triggered my choice to go into teaching. It is an experience that constantly bothers me, and I feel it may end up affecting my work professionally as a teacher, and quite possibly my personal life. I am in need of a trusted friend like you to help me through this ... I don't feel comfortable sharing this with anyone else.

Can you spare some time to talk with me?

Troubled,

Beth

From: Ellis, Caroline [Ellis@univ.ca]

To: Smith, Beth [bsmith@yahoo.ca]

Subject: Help!

Dear Beth,

What is going on? What horrible experience happened to you at your work that triggered your leaving that career and switching into teaching?

Yes Beth, our sharing our personal experiences can enhance and illuminate our understanding of academic material as bell Hooks suggested. Reflecting on your experience will also help you better understand the self who teaches. As you may recall from our class, Palmer (1998) once wrote, "Teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a chance to gain self-knowledge, and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject. We teach who we are."

Please write soon as I am worried about you! Thinking of you,

Caroline

Dear Caroline,

I have decided to write instead of emailing you. I guess I should start by saying that I was not completely honest with you in your course about why I went into the teaching profession. Yes, I was drawn to it because there were many links between planning and teaching. But, there was another issue - one that I have not shared with anyone.

After our first son was born, we decided to relocate to a smaller town on the east coast. After we moved, I looked for work as a professional planner. I felt fortunate to find a full-time government position. When I went for my interview, I was very much interested in the position. I was going to be working on cases, sitting in on hearings, preparing appeal files and reports. This kind of responsibility excited me.

At first, I very much enjoyed the job, but after a month on the job, things turned. My director started to ask me to leave boardroom meetings to make him photocopies (I was always the only female present, and it was me whom he asked to make the copies). He would not allow me to prepare reports - he only allowed me to proofread his reports. He had me stay in my office and work on preparing applications but not speaking

to the clients, and he had me preparing letters for his signature. Essentially I was working as his secretary. I found this work was not a challenge and I was bored. I began to dislike going in to work.

I recall a conversation we had one morning, when my Director misplaced his agenda from a meeting.

"Did you take my agenda from the meeting this morning?"

"No" I replied, "but you can have my copy if you want it".

"No" he said, "just make me a copy".

I didn't want to walk around to the other side of the office building just to make him a copy of my agenda which I didn't need and which I already had a copy of on my computer, so I replied, and said "No really, here have mine, and I'll get myself a copy off the computer later."

He replied firmly and said "No. Make me a photocopy", and he walked away.

This made me feel very small and I felt it was not my job to photocopy something that he lost especially when I offered him a copy already.

My director started to watch the clock for every minute that I came and went from lunch or when I arrived in the morning. He started

telling me I was a poor speller and that I need to "check, double check and triple check my work" because it was not prepared properly. He told me I was not ready to write reports. He told me I was not a team player. When I suggested that I was trying to be a team player by requesting meetings, he said: "look, I've played on a hockey team, so I know what a team player is, and you aren't one". He did not know that I desperately was trying to become part of his "boys club" but they wouldn't let me in. They had discussions each day in their offices about golf (a sport I don't play, so I didn't join the conversation), and while they discussed golf, they brought up other work issues too, but forgot to inform me of what was going on. He started to nitpick my work and stopped being kind to me. I started to hate him.

When my director gave me a poor performance evaluation, indicating that I could not spell, or write, I started to document everything that he said or did. I did this for about three months. I felt too that my performance had changed, but it was not that I couldn't spell, or write. My performance changed because I was a nervous wreck everyday! I felt that I was being continuously watched and monitored, my work was demeaning and no longer challenging, and my director made my

workplace dismal. Working with this kind of stress each day was starting to affect my performance - - and it certainly was affecting my home life. I couldn't go home each day and feel happy about my work, and I spent many nights complaining about my situation to my husband. To top it off, this was the first time that I had been separated from my baby, and I couldn't believe that I had to leave him each day, to go to this job to do something that I hated. It didn't seem fair that someone else was being paid to do something that I would have loved to do, which was to look after my baby, and that I had to go and work for this director whom I despised for making me feel so horrible. My husband encouraged me to talk to someone else in the office, to try to improve my situation.

I went to my director's supervisor finally, to say that I thought I was being treated unfairly, my boss was giving me work that was not in my job description, and was not giving me any of the work outlined in the job description, and that, in fact, I was acting as a secretary. This supervisor told me flat out that he had seen my director doing this to me, but that was a fact of life. "We can't all like our bosses. Just get along," he said and that was that. No further discussion.

Later that same week, I was waiting all morning to talk to my director about a letter that he needed "urgently" but his office door was closed. Finally when it opened, he came out with another man from the office laughing their heads off and headed off to "Tim's" for a coffee. Knowing that he needed this letter "urgently," I went in to his office to put the letter on his desk. When I looked at his desk, there on the computer screen was a pornographic site of two women lying naked together, and a man standing behind them. I was sickened that the two of them were in the office together, with the door shut looking at this site, and that they came out laughing ... and to think he told me that I could use my time more wisely! I documented this too.

Throughout much of this experience, I was pregnant. When I finally submitted my maternity leave form, they took it, and two hours later told me that I was being fired. I grabbed my books and left. I cried all the way to my husband's office. Never in my life had I felt so low, so pathetic, like such a loser. I felt I was stupid, that I couldn't write, and that in fact, I couldn't do anything.

My husband was very supportive and encouraged me to take the issue to the union and the human rights commission. After many

discussions with lawyers and union people, I won, and signed the forms the day my second son was born while I was in the hospital. I received a monetary settlement and a personal letter of apology from that director, but on that day, as I sat and read his letter with my new baby in my arms, I vowed that I would not return to the planning profession after my maternity leave, or ever again. At the time, of course, this decision was made out of anger and humiliation, of not wanting to be back in the planning community.

Yes, I knew that I had won on paper, but in my mind, I knew I lost. I knew that it would continue to haunt me and forever be an uncomfortable topic for me to discuss. Many people in this community, including my friends knew this man and would say to me "Oh, I can't believe that he would ever be like that!" (Thus assuming that yes, I was the one who deserved his treatment.)

How can I direct my energy of this awful experience in a positive way? I don't tell people about this experience because I feel stupid and embarrassed about it, and I feel like people will always take his side. Will I forever have to be embarrassed about my experiences as a

professional planner? Am I being true to myself by leaving that profession and moving into teaching?

Palmer's (1998) quote that we teach who we are also has me concerned. How will my teaching be affected by this incident? Especially since the incident actually triggered my choice to become a teacher. I wonder if my practice and my teacher identity will always have the imprint of this power struggle. Can the shame I feel be transformed into some form of agency and empowerment?

Do you have any advice?

Confused, Beth

Dear Beth,

I admire your strength Beth. I want you to know I don't fault you at all - - in fact, I believe it was very blatant and stupid behaviour from the administration there. It was smart of you to be so well-supported with your documentation and that you used official channels for recourse.

This story very much needs to be told Beth – told and retold, for yourself, and for others. You know, it doesn't have to be positive experiences that shape us. Sometime negative or sad experiences turn out to be quite transformational for us. For example, I have found that my experience of my mother passing away at an early age from breast cancer, allows me to better understand myself as a teacher and learner.

It is not obvious what we are gaining from a negative experience as it happens. Often, we become so overwhelmed by it that we don't notice what we have taken or gained from the experience itself. I didn't know what I had gained from my experience until I began to look back on it, and when I did, I realized that I grew a lot through my experience with family illness, and that I even found some comfort in the telling and remembering.

I don't blame you for wanting to change careers, and I think the change will do you good. Yet, I question your feelings of incompetence. Your story doesn't demonstrate to me that you are stupid, and in my mind, you shouldn't at all be embarrassed by what you did, or your by experience. Rather, it demonstrates to me what strength you have as a woman, and that you are very brave. Sometimes it is

suffering that allows us to see such strength, and I certainly see strength in you and your actions.

I thought about your story all day today Beth, and your questions regarding how this experience may affect your teaching practice, and if your teacher identity will always have the imprint of the power struggle you experienced.

I think you can and will be able to take the shame that you feel as a result of this experience and transform it. I urge you to read "The Everyday World as Problematic" by Dorothy Smith, as I think you would find her work important for your own understanding of what has happened. She writes about what she calls "ruling relation" and I think this is something that you have experienced in your workplace.

As well, Smith (1987) writes about the importance of individual self-disclosure, as it can direct inquiry into a set of social relations. She explains "the notion of such bases of experience (in the everyday world) has empirical force in women's experience of consciousness-raising as a method by which, in coming together and talking about our lives, we could elucidate the common grounds of our oppression" (p. 176). This brings to light not just common experiences, but experiences that are grounded in social relations. She explains that the aim is to disclose the social process from within as it is lived" (p. 177). By explaining to you how I have found reflecting back on the illnesses in my family has raised my consciousness about women's gendered identities, I think you will be able to see that your experience too is grounded in social relations.

I'll begin Beth, by telling you that I have always spent a considerable amount of time worrying about my father as a result of a heart attack he had when I was in high school. I worried constantly about where he went, the food he ate, his check ups, the amount of exercise he had, etc. I began to think in terms of my own health - - healthy eating and exercise. My life focused on being heart smart so that the same experience would not happen to me.

I was so consumed by my father's health it never even crossed my mind that my mother could have become ill. Sure, she smoked, and rarely exercised, but she was a ball of energy. She was always busy, looking after my dad, my self and my sister, but she also kept herself occupied with her garden, her friends, her work as a nurse, and her hobby of drawing and arts and crafts. She was happy. Then, suddenly, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

It's funny how pain has a way of disrupting happiness. It was only shortly after I was married when my mom was diagnosed with breast cancer. I remember thinking "Well, it's only breast cancer ... lots of women have breast cancer, and its EASILY cured!" That was when I was young and naïve, and really, knew NOTHING about breast cancer. Mom didn't' really ever talk about it with me, nor did my dad. Maybe they didn't even talk about it with each other.

Anyway, the whole breast cancer issue came and went quickly. So quickly in fact that it only seemed a matter of days from when she was diagnosed that she had the lumpectomy and radiation, and it was done and over with. Yet, it was much more than that. Mom spent a few weeks living at a home for cancer patients in Toronto

while undergoing radiation. I wonder how she felt? We never talked then, at least not about her breast cancer. We talked only of good things it seems but never of things that scared us. We didn't talk either about how to change her lifestyle, about breast cancer prevention, or about changing my lifestyle or my sisters .... we assumed medicine would have done its job to cure her.

When mom finally appeared to be well again, I quickly forgot about her breast cancer, but I was still consumed with my father's health. For some reason, I felt that a heart attack was more serious than breast cancer. Every time something happened to my father, I went into a state of panic. When he had to go into the hospital on Christmas day one year because he was sweaty and sick, I assumed the worst - - I assumed there was again something wrong with his heart. When my parents came to visit me out east after my son was born, my father opened the back door and fell right in, onto the floor – again I thought it was his heart, but he got up and seemed fine. When my husband said he saw my dad out the window, drinking at 8:00 a.m – it was then, that I knew that my father's recent "illnesses" were not related to his heart – but rather to a drinking problem. My husband and I confronted my mother at the time. She agreed that yes, my father had been drinking too much. She told us of a series of incidents that made us conclude that my father was an alcoholic. We confronted my father, and he agreed to slow his drinking down. I assumed he would do this, and I assumed my mother would look after it. Again, I was naïve.

I was so focused on my father I had barely thought about my mother's health at all. That is, until she had been visiting with us for a few days following the birth of

our son. She had been complaining quite a bit of a sore back, and none of the muscle medications that I gave her seemed to relieve the pain. I remember our conversation as we sat while I nursed my baby.

"Mom, how long have you had this sore back?" I said in an annoying tone, as if to say to her, why have you not had this looked after?

"For quite some time" she replied, not looking at me.

"You are awfully thin too" I said, noticing that she had recently lost quite a bit of weight. "Have you seen a doctor?"

"Yes" she said quietly. "She thinks I'm sick" she said to my dad as I noticed he walked into the room.

My father didn't say anything. I wondered if she was seeking validation from him, or if she was trying to say "See, I told you I am sick", as if they had discussed it before, but I couldn't tell. They had both been very evasive about their health. At that point I hadn't thought about her breast cancer recurring. I simply thought she wasn't looking after herself. She seemed malnourished, frail and weak - - not at all like my mother who looked after my dad, loved to help with the babies, garden, cook, clean etc. Mom was always active, and during this visit, she could barely even get up off the couch. Something was wrong. We did not discuss it again until a few months later.

A few months after mom went back home, she was diagnosed as having terminal breast cancer - - they gave her a few months to a year. Within days, my mother went on morphine for pain and it completely altered her personality. It made her nauseous, she couldn't drive, she had to have someone help her cook and get to where she needed to go. She needed help administering the morphine so that she would not take too much. She needed help dealing with the pain. She needed help cleaning and looking after the house. She required around the clock care by my father, and he insisted that he was up to the task. It was not until I received a call from my aunt, asking me to find a way to remove my father from my mother's house because he was drunk in the basement and passed out on his desk, that I realized he was not up to the task - - he was sick too.

This was a terrible time in my life Beth. I had a newborn son, my mother waiting to die in Ontario, and my father was an alcoholic.

My father began to attend AA. It took him a few weeks, but he began to clean himself up. I was proud of him for being determined to change, but felt nervous for both him and my mom.

Seeing my parents like that, struggling each day was a very difficult experience for me. I can still picture my mom with her oxygen mask on, struggling each day to stay alive. I remember the smell of her in the hospital, the changes that occurred to her body making her frail and weak, unrecognizable in fact.

I remember her last hours. I got a call, that mom was not doing well. I caught the next flight. I remember the hour-long drive from the airport to the hospital in the freezing rain, my sister calling ... I knew something was wrong. I remember running down the hospital hallway completely out of breath, desperate to get there to see my mom, when I heard her from her room asking, "Where is she?" "I'm here!" I said as I burst into the room. My mom's eyes were shining with delight as I ran into the room, and she sat in a chair surrounded by my family. We all sat together, drank tea, and shared stories. When she became tired she lay down. After a long while, she suddenly sat up and grabbed our hands. She arranged them in a circle on her stomach and put her own hands on top. "I'm tired" she said. I knew that she didn't want anymore, that she didn't want to go on. She wanted to be free of the cancer that was invading her body. She sat up and put her head on my father's shoulder. She told him she was sorry. He comforted her for a moment. She lay down and closed her eyes. We told her that we loved her, we told her it was time for her to rest. I held her hand and I watched her die.

So, you are probably asking yourself what this experience of mine has anything to do with your horrible work incident?

Well, you asked in your last letter if your teaching would always be affected by your workplace incident, and you wondered if your practice and teacher identity would always have the imprint of that power struggle, and if you could transform the shame you felt into empowerment. Indeed Beth, you can transform your experiences

into empowerment, as it is through our experiences, and reflecting on them that we can gain new knowledge.

When I reflected back on these memories of illness in my family, I began to see the gender power issues that were embedded in my family. For example, you may have noticed in my experience, how my mother and I set up a binary between the role of a mother in contrast to that of a man. I never thought of it at the time, but in my memory, it seems that I and others in my family, considered my mother responsible for the health of my father, and as well the health of herself. In my memories, I thought of her as being responsible for my father's health, both in making sure he was eating well and exercising after his heart attack, and also diagnosing his conditions and caring for him as an alcoholic. Yet when my mother became ill, I felt her own health was also somehow her own responsibility - - angry at her for not looking after herself better, and I even felt sorry for my father for having to deal with it. It seems that my family and I considered caregiving as being the responsibility of a woman - - my mother.

Examining this experience from a distance, allowed me to acknowledge that my mother was gender cast. We, and she, expected that her principle role was to serve others, in particular, my father and my sister and I. According to Gilligan, women have been socialized to "devote themselves to the care and empowerment of others while remaining 'selfless'. Accepting that the world is and should be hierarchically arranged and dualistic, the received knowers channel their increasing

sense of self into their growing capacity to care for others" (as cited by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger &Tarule, 1997, p.46).

You may wonder how an educated woman such as myself, who believes strongly that women are equal to men, could have felt this way - - could have let my mom continue in a position where she was serving others? Well, I use a quote by Jaggar (1983) who uses Gramsci's notion of hegemony to explain myself. Jagger states hegemony, is "a concept designed to explain how a dominant class maintains control by projecting its own particular way of seeing social reality so successfully that its view is accepted as common sense and as part of the natural order by those who in fact are subordinated to it" (Lewis, 1992, p. 174). "In this respect, hegemony is accomplished through an ongoing struggle over meaning not only against, but for the maintenance of, power" (Lewis, 1992, p. 174). So you see, myself, my father and even my mother all held a common view that the mother is the caregiver in a family. It was what we had always been exposed to in our society - - it seemed very natural to feel this way. I had no idea at the time that I was gender casting.

And why did I feel such a need to be so protective of my father? Why did I worry about him so much after he had his heart attack? I mean, of course I know I loved him, and would of course worry about him and his health, but why did I take on worrying so much about his food and exercise - - after all, he was a grown man.

I remember even going to visit my parents when my mom was sick, and before even going in to see my mom, I would I stop to shovel the walkway for my dad, just to

help out, because I knew he was "burdened" by the fact that he had to look after my mother. Why did I do this? Why did I feel the urge to help him so much? Again, I think this has to do with gender issues in my family, and I think I have found some answers in an article by Magda Lewis (1992) explaining women often are protective on behalf of men. "The response women bring to feminist politics / analysis arises from women's social/political location within patriarchic forms, which requires that men be at the focus of women's attentions. (Lewis, 1992, p.174).

So Beth, I tell you this story of mine so that you might ask yourself these important questions:

- *Did this type of binary between men and women operate in your office?*
- *Do you believe that you were submissive and capitulating because of gender expectations?*
- *Do you feel that you left because you disrupted a patriarchial hierarchy?*

Thinking of you,

Caroline

Dear Caroline,

Thank you so much for your letter. I cried as I read it. I think that no matter how prepared we think we are, there is no greater loss and finality than the passing of a mother. I know your mom must have loved you dearly, and how proud she quite deservedly must have been of her daughter. I imagine that must have been quite a time for you, but it seems that the epiphany of your mother's death brought you to a sense of understanding about your own career. It is obviously an experience very personal to you, but as you say, it has also intruded on your public, professional life.

I appreciate you telling the story, and relating your experience to gender issues, because I can now see the gender power issues that existed in my experience more clearly.

Yes, I do feel that there was a binary operating in the office. The binary that existed was extremely frustrating for me to cope with at the time. Here I was, a well-educated woman, sitting in boardroom meetings with a bunch of men who gave little or no attention to my opinions. They

considered me to be their secretary, asking me to make their photocopies, when in fact I was in a position equal to theirs.

I glanced through the book by Dorothy Smith that you recommended, and I really resonated with the poem *"On Refusing Your Invitation to Come to Dinner"* by Celia Gilbert that illustrates these experiences such as mine that exclude women:

> But I am forgetting the language,
> sitting has become difficult,
> and the speaking, intolerable,
> to say "how interesting"
> makes me weep.
> I can no longer bear to hear
> the men around the table laugh,
> argue, agree,
> then pause, politely
> while we speak,
> their breath held in,
> exhaled
> when we've finished,
> politely,
> then turn to the real conversation,
> the unspoken expectation of applause."
> (Smith, 1987, p. 34)

Indeed, I feel I directly experienced exclusionary forces in my workplace, as well as subordination, and that has very much affected me. Never in my life had I felt so low, so pathetic, like such a loser. I felt I

was stupid, that I couldn't write, and that in fact, I couldn't do anything. I felt that I couldn't live up to my own expected standard of a professional woman - - that I was a disappointment to myself, and probably even to my parents. After all, I went to university, I was trained in the job, but why couldn't I keep up to the men in my office?

You also asked in your letter if I felt I was submissive and capitulating because of gender expectations. Likely there were times when I was submissive, because it was so obviously the expectation around the office that I would be doing the more submissive work such as photocopying for the men in the office. This was a disappointment to myself, the fact that it even existed and was accepted practice in the workplace.

Lastly, you asked if I felt that I left the office because I disrupted a patriarchial hierarchy. Indeed, I think I did. While I did win the grievance I filed, and was asked to return to my position, I quickly declined. How could I ever return to that workplace again? I felt the tension that would have likely existed between myself and the other men in the office would have been unbearable, not to mention the anger they would have felt toward me for disrupting their "boys club". Looking back

now, I am glad that I did leave, as the experience has led me into new and exciting changes in my life, but at the time, it certainly felt as though I had no real choice in that decision.

When I reflect back on my experience in this way now, I feel that this experiential knowledge of relations of dominance and patriarchy, has allowed me to come to an understanding of ruling relations, and exclusionary forces. It has also allowed me to come to terms with my own gendered identity which I hadn't considered before. This makes me want to always strive for respect and equality in my workplaces and in the classroom, and encourage others to respect others as equals. As well, my experience has now encouraged me to be aware of those who are silenced, to help them find their voice.

I think this is what I have gained. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. It was very enlightening for me.

Sincerely,

Beth

Dear Beth,

I was amazed in your first letter how you wrote so intensely about pain and resistance in your professional life, and now, in your most recent letter, I am so pleased to see how well you have been able to critically read your situation.

I am wondering, apart from the workplace situation that you experienced, was Planning a career for which you felt passion? I ask because just before my mother died, I came across the following poem:

The Summer Day, by Mary Oliver

Who made the world?
Who made the swan, and the black bear?
Who made the grasshopper?
This grasshopper, I mean –
The one who has flung herself out of the grass,
The one who is eating sugar out of my hand,
Who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down –
Who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
Into the grass, how to kneel in the grass,
How to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
Which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
Tell me, what is it you plan to do
With your one wild and precious life?

Those last words: "tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" really resonated with me after my mother died. When I thought about

my mother, she worked as a nurse - - a job she never enjoyed. Rather, it was art that gave her the maximum zest and enthusiasm.

My mom could take plain, empty walls and transform them into ivy-covered walls or stencilled delights in the space of a day. She easily took an empty lot and designed it into a beautiful home for us to live - - with no training as an architect. I watched as she transformed our backyard into a delightful garden of beautiful flowers, just for my wedding, and how she transformed a church into a beautiful celebration of fall for my sister's. I listened, amused as one of her last words of advice to my sister in the hospital, were how Velcro tape would do wonders for hanging a cloth curtain in her bathroom. My last memory, one that I will never forget, was of my mom placing the hands of myself, my father, sister, and aunt, artistically on her chest before she lay down and peacefully passed away.

While I watched my mother die, I reflected on circumstances of her life. My mother was an artist and a creator, but she was discouraged from following her passion. She was told by her parents and by the career counsellors in her high school that there were no careers in art, and that she should do what most women do, and that was become a nurse.

I decided, after watching my mother die, that I wanted to make sure in my short time here on earth, that I fill my days with work that I feel passionately about. I decided that it is important to put my unique talents to work – not just work for the sake of work.

My experience made me start thinking of how I could spend my days being absolutely true to myself. I started thinking that I want a life and lifestyle that will make me glad to get up in the morning and go to bed at night, a life that would give me the maximum zest and enthusiasm.

Education is my passion, and it was becoming a mother that made me see this more clearly. I felt compelled to focus my working and academic pursuits on understanding the most central issue in my life - - raising children. My experience with motherhood allowed me to understand the nourishment we can give and receive from others, and the importance of connectedness through relations with others. It gave me a sense of wholeness in my life, and made me acknowledge my self in relation to others. Prior to having my children, I had never understood the importance of community as I do now, nor how our connectedness with others is such a vital part of life.

Knowing this allowed me to resonate with the writings of Palmer (1998) and hooks (1994)who as well believe that connectedness and community are vital parts of life. Palmer suggests community goes far beyond our face-to-face relationship with each other as human beings to connect us with the...'great things' of the world, and with 'the grace of great things'. He believes we are in community with all of these great things, and that great teaching is about knowing that community, feeling that community, sensing that community, and then drawing your students into it (p. 106). hooks (2003) writes that community is the source of our hope, and the place

where our passion to connect and learn with others is constantly fulfilled (p.xvi) and I agree.

Tell me Beth, what are you passionate about?

Thinking of you,

Caroline

Dear Caroline,

As you know, I am very passionate about educational theory. However, lately I have found myself being concerned about the intersection of theory and practice in education. You see, I encountered disillusionment between theory and practice in the planning field.

When I think back, I remember that I chose to study Planning after many discussions with my parents. It was my mother who initially suggested it as she felt that it was a career that incorporated many of my skills and passions. We were all familiar with the Planning Profession since dad was an Engineer. I knew that Planning incorporated organizational skills, creative and artistic skills, future thinking, a desire to create liveable spaces in communities, a knack at being able to think about balancing diverse thoughts and opinions, and an understanding of municipal issues and environmental issues. I felt that because I enjoyed art, the outdoors and the environment, and was always an organized, future oriented person that this career would suit me to a "T". Plus, I felt comfortable in knowing that it was somewhat similar to my dad's profession, and that we would share something in common.

Once I entered planning school, I very much enjoyed the theory of Planning. In particular, I enjoyed the writings of Jane Jacobs (1961), author of *Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In her book she espouses cities as ecosystems, suggesting that cities respond to how people interact with them. She discussed how each element of a city (housing, parks, sidewalks, etc) all function together and are interconnected in the same manner as a natural ecosystem. I found that I really connected with ideas relating to sustainability.

Other themes that Jacobs discussed in her book were diversity (integration of different building types and uses, whether residential or commercial purposes, for the purposes of social and community vitality) and bottom-up as opposed to top-down community planning. Jacobs contested that local expertise, and speaking to the people in the community who are impacted by development is what really matters. These ideas also really resonated with me.

I was bothered by this passion because I never felt I could put the theories of planning into practice. The jobs I held were far from visionary. Rather, they involved narrow thinking, and much of my work was focused on applying regulatory measures, worrying about setbacks,

variances, etc. - - not much focus on the big picture of planning. As a result, I found myself not enjoying my work at all, and in fact, it was zapping the life out of me.

Further, it became obvious to me that planning was not necessarily as "participatory" as it claimed to be in theory. I found that often, the planners I worked with spoke in ways that regular people could not always understand - - ways that I am certain mystified the general public. Often, I found people were only informed to act or participate, but not really encouraged to do so. It baffled me that we weren't working to organize and enable citizen learning and participation.

Now, as I am entering a career in education, I am again worried about the practice / theory divide. I wonder sometimes if I will come to a point in my career in teaching where I will encounter a similar disillusionment. I am dreading the thought of it!

Beth

Dear Beth,

The ideas about planning that you learned through Jane Jacobs' writing say much about life, not just about planning. The themes you resonated with are about respecting the human fabric of life, and I see many connections of these philosophies of planning with everyday life, and with teaching.

I can completely understand what you are trying to say about your work zapping the life out of you. I think what you are searching for is something that can bring more wholeness to your life – not the kind of fragmentation that you felt in the practice of planning.

Like you, I wish participatory planning was the case. In the classroom, there are also lots of examples of profound change in theory, yet there are also examples of practices dressed up in the new language of change, but perhaps that is all that they are. Teachers like yourself, who know this, will best be able to effect helpful change and to provide real classroom communities that will create environments where change will be possible for more and more students. Teachers like you will work hard to address the basis for change. As Palmer (1998) indicates, we know reality only by being in community with it ourselves (p. 97). In addition, he states "in the community of truth, as in real life, there are no pristine objects of knowledge and no ultimate authorities" (p. 101). To be in community with your classroom, being participatory means participating yourself as a teacher - - sharing stories, knowledge and experiences with your students. I feel this is a great way to link theory and practice in education.

The intersection of theory and practice is such an important issue in education, and it helps to understand it if you think of two different kinds of theory:

- *macro or abstracted theory – those theories typically generated by academic researchers studying classroom practices, contexts and phenomena, and which are studied in teacher education programs; and*
- *micro, or idiosyncratic theory – those theories that are developed mainly by teachers or practitioners through the examination of their own experiences, practices, beliefs, values, perspectives, attitudes, and ideas, and which are more particularistic or personal in nature (Cole & Knowles, 2000).*

Macro and micro theories can influence one another in important ways (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 10). As well, we can fuse theory and practice by using reflexive practice in our teaching. Reflexive practice comes about by melding these two kinds of theory and processes of theory generation - - that is by considering elements of general theories in the context of your own particular theories. In this way, according to Cole & Knowles (2000), teachers are both theory generators and theory users, and "the integration of elements or principles of both kinds of theories is the essence of reflexive or inquiring practice" (p. 11). When theory can be defined in this way, then there is no longer a gap between theory and practice. And, as hooks (1994) states, "when our lived experience of theorizing is fundamentally linked to processes of self-recovery, of collective liberation, no gap exists between theory and practice". (p. 61).

In addition to sharing stories with students, I also find writing, theoretical talk to be meaningful to me, and I hope that some form of theory is emerging from my efforts to make sense of my everyday life experiences in this way. As stated by hooks (1994), personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making" (p. 70).

Lately I have been thinking about my experience with childbirth, and trying to link theory with that experience. I found out when I was 34 weeks pregnant that my baby was breeched. Despite two external versions to flip the baby around to a head-down position, he remained breeched until 38 weeks. I was to have a planned c-section. The idea of delivery by a caesarean section was very unsettling for me, as I was diverted off my path of an ideal vaginal delivery, and forced to go down this new, unknown, unplanned path.

Of course I had great feelings of happiness and excitement about the birth of my new baby, but I also felt sad upon learning that a c-section was necessary. I found the whole experience would be too intrusive and not at all what I wanted.

I remember on the day my baby was born, driving to the hospital. I thought I had come to terms with the fact that I needed to have a planned c-section, but while driving along the road, I unexpectedly broke down sobbing, and had to pull over. I couldn't believe that I had no choice but to undergo this intrusive surgery and it really had a negative impact on me. I wanted to birth my baby, to participate in the labour and delivery, yet I was being denied that experience and I felt helpless. I

suddenly felt that I could understand how my mother must have felt when she was told that she was going to die of cancer - - she must have wanted to yell out and say "NO! This was not planned - - it is not my time to die!" It is an awful feeling having no control over what is going to happen to you.

When I got to the hospital I was sent to the surgery area. I recall sitting in a bright room, on an operating table, being given a spinal block to numb me from the waist down, and a curtain being draped across my tummy. I felt the sensation of pressure as my doctor made the incision, and after, a very odd tugging sensation when my baby was removed from my uterus.

After being taken away from me to check for vital signs, my son was brought to me and held near my face. I cried as my husband and I held our new baby for the first time. I was crying with such mixed emotions. Part of me was so happy to see my tiny perfect healthy little baby, but part of me was also crying because my first encounter with him was not at all what I had anticipated. I found myself thinking about how invasive the whole procedure had been. Snatched from me was the heart-warming image that I wanted of me, tired, sweaty exhausted from hours of labour, and overjoyed by the birth of my baby. Having a c-section left me feeling as though I was denied the personal pleasure of birthing my baby that I had so looked forward to.

After the baby was born and while I recovered in the hospital I was also shocked to see the incision in my stomach in the bathroom mirror. The mirror was saying to me "this is who you are now!", but I had never expected to appear this way! Women's bodies are not represented in this way on television, in newspapers, movies - - or even

prenatal movies - - I had never seen an image of a woman with a mutilated tummy before, and I was shocked.

How could I even feel this way, when I am an educated woman who should not be impacted by fashion, and media. And why do I say "I shouldn't be impacted by this?", and yet I am? Why am I so disappointed in what has happened with my body? Shouldn't I be happy with the way I look?

This experience allows me to relate to gender theories in a better way. It allows me to see how I am shaped by my culture and my society around me. It has offered a unique advantage for me to intersect theory with practice in my life. Through pregnancy and birthing my babies, I have come to know that when you are pregnant, delivering a baby, or even breastfeeding, your body becomes public property. According to Bailey (1999), women often find that their bodies have become 'public property', "to be commented upon, patted and prodded, sometimes by people they knew very little or even complete strangers. They described their bodies as being 'invaded'" (p. 340). My c-section felt like a very invasive procedure of which I had no control over. The experience really, was no longer mine. Indeed, Bailey explains how in pregnancy, the self can become blurred as the body no longer seems to operate as a physical marker of individuality (p. 340). A poem I found by Margaret Shaw-MacKinnon (2001) describes this dualism:

> *"A woman is a door. Never is this more apparent than when she bears a child. She parts her legs in blood and pain, opens the door to the world, to a being of flesh and blood, a baby, an infant, her baby.*

A woman is a door and she knows this, when, after the birth of her baby, her body creaks and the winds blow through, and she has a rounded belly, dripping, sagging, ever-full breasts, stretch marks, where chaos and dissolution have loomed large. She has been close to the blackness of space. Her skin, pulled taut, stretched, was broken, but the winds have not torn her to pieces yet. She knows her own greyness, her own silvered fragility. She accepts how she opened like a silver flower to let into life a pink, round-cheeked perfect human being. She welcomes his scowl and lusty cry, his sucking at her tender breast.

Everything is alive with the sighs and flutters of the infant in the bedside cradle. The world is renewed, animate.

A woman is a door. She holds her infants hand and walks with him, through herself into the hopeful new world."(p. 229)

It is interesting to note that this dualism between mind and body exists in women much the same way that the dualism exists between theory and practice.

My experience of motherhood has also made me aware of the paradox of mothering, and the challenges this can bring to women and their careers. Motherhood can, and is morally enhancing, but it is also socially devaluing as it is not acknowledged as "work."

As educators, we must learn to stop thinking the world apart in this way. Palmer (1998) states "We see everything as this or that, plus or minus, on or off, black or while; and we fragment reality into an endless series of either-ors. In a phrase, we think the world apart" (p. 62). As Palmer indicates, while thinking the world apart has given us great power, it has also given us a fragmented sense of reality that destroys the wholeness and wonder of life (p. 62). He goes on to say we must escape the grip of either-or-thinking, and start thinking the world together

again by paradoxically joining apparent opposites and embracing opposites as one (p. 63). "It is crucial that we see how the terms interrelate, how they have been historically constructed as opposites, and how they have been used to justify and naturalize power relations" (Orner, 1992, p. 78). "Such an either/or view sets up misguided and inappropriate frameworks for understanding teaching and guiding ongoing career-long teacher development" (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p.10).

Thinking of you,

Caroline

Dear Caroline,

As I near the end of my Master of Education degree, I am so thankful that we have had this opportunity to exchange letters. Not only have you helped me through a personal issue affecting my self and teacher identity, but the sharing of our stories has enhanced my knowledge of education, and I have also come to view some of my own experiences in a new light.

When I first wrote to you a few weeks ago, I was concerned if my teacher identity would always have the imprint of the power struggle I experienced at work. I wondered if the shame I felt could be transformed into some form of agency and empowerment.

Your first letter described how through writing about your experiences with illness in your family, you became aware of gender and power issues. This experience got me thinking about the binary that was operating in the workplace I had described to you. I started thinking that perhaps my role was considered to be submissive because of my own gender expectations of myself and the expectations of others in the office. I came to the conclusion I had to leave, not only that job, but that profession because I had disrupted a patriarchial hierarchy.

After reading your letter, I wondered if I had hoped to escape power and ruling relations by becoming an educator and educational researcher. I may have wanted to escape it at the time, but now, I know I can't escape power structures and ruling relations. Through our correspondence, I have become increasingly aware of the ways in which gender and power relations affect our lives as women. I am also aware that the educational discipline is not free of power relations. In fact, I have read of particular concern to many feminist educators who take seriously the experiences of women and girls in schooling "is the ongoing opposition to and undermining of feminist work through sexist, patriarchal and phallocentric knowledge systems which militate against women in the academy" (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 193).

Luke and Gore (1992) suggest "the way relations of power and knowledge are organized in and through the university make it possible to live these relations without reflecting on them .... This "not seeing" participates in the ruling practices which regulate the social relations in which we live. Historically, universities have been, and continue to be, central to the production and reproduction of such practices" (p. 194).

Obviously sexism and patriarchy occur in the university setting as well, so by becoming a teacher, I know I will not be escaping the power struggles. What I do know, is that the questions from my first letter have been answered. My teacher identity may always have the imprint of the power struggle I experienced, but I hope to use that experience and share it with others in a positive way. In fact, being able to name this experience has been beneficial for me in the sense that I now know how to share it with others, and also how to better understand the experiences of others.

As hooks (1994) describes, "It is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from that location" (p. 74), but students can benefit when teachers (both men and women) create theory from the location of pain and struggle. Indeed, each of us have unique experiences and we can learn through telling and listening to the stories of others. MacKinnon states that, "we know things with our lives and we live that knowledge, beyond what any theory has yet theorized. Making this theory is the challenge before us. For in its production lies the hope of our liberation, in its production lies the possibility of naming all our pain – of making all our hurt go away" (hooks, 1994, p. 75). In this way, of reflecting on our

experiences and naming our pain and resistance, we are linking theory and practice.

Through our letters, I have come to learn that I have been bothered in my life about the binaries that have shaped my experiences -- the either or thinking, the binary structures of domination that exist in the society in which I live. Dualisms such as Man/Woman, Father/Mother, Husband/Wife, Theory/Practice, Teacher/Student, Oppressor/Oppressed are often thought of as the privileging of the first term over the second. I have come to learn that either/or thinking sustains relations of power. According to writers such as Orner (1992), Palmer (1998), and hooks (1994), we need to stop thinking the world apart and start thinking the world together, and understanding connections.

Palmer assumes identity is the intersection of the diverse forces that make up life, and integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring wholeness and life rather than fragmentation and death. Indeed, teachers or not, we all have diverse forces in our lives, but we must learn how to relate to these forces and paradoxes in a way that allows us to grow and change positively so that we are not sustaining power relations.

One way we can do this perhaps, is to think about power in positive terms as Shrewsbury (1987) has suggested. She writes:

> By focusing on empowerment, feminist pedagogy embodies a concept of power as energy, capacity, and potential rather than as domination...This conception of power recognizes that people need power, both as a way to maintain a sense of self and as a way to accomplish ends. (Shrewsbury as cited in Orner, 1992, p. 83)

In my work as an educator, I hope to create contexts where students can feel empowered. I think it is important that we try to correct the silencing of people in our culture at large, to help students find and articulate their voices, to see how they or others may have been dominated by those with power, and also to see how they can have power within themselves too. "It is indeed necessary for educators and educational theorists to discard monarchical conceptions of power and shift focus to notions of power as productive and present in all contexts, regulating discourses and social interactions" (Orner, 1992, p. 83).

Indeed, if I can learn this much through our letters, imagine what I can learn from my students? As hooks (1994) describes in her book, we can learn as much through our students and their lived experiences. A

classroom needs to be a place where both students and teachers grow, sharing lived experiences so as to better understand the intersection between theory and practice.

I have decided to pursue a Ph.D. in education, so that I may one day teach at the university level. I now feel confident in this choice, and look forward to a commitment of engaged and critical pedagogical practices in my classroom.

As hooks (1994) writes, and what I hope for in my own teaching, is for teaching and learning to be a location of possibility. She states,

> The classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility. In that field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom" (p. 207).

Thank you again Caroline. You have been a wonderful mentor.

Fondest regards, Beth

PART THREE –ANALYSIS

Identity emerges; it is greater than the sum of its parts – much like a cake is a product of its ingredients and not a simple compound. Although composed of discrete, conscious elements, identity is bound and organized internally and unconsciously and cannot be easily contained in words. In forming a core of who we "are", identity weaves together all the aspects of ourselves and our various locations with others and with the larger society. (Josselson, 1996, p.28)

I agree with Palmer (1998) that good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher, an integrity grounded in both my strengths and also my weaknesses. Initially this thesis was meant to explore my identity - - the self who teaches. I now realize, that in addition to identifying the forces that shape my identity, the writing of this thesis was itself an act of constructing a self (a gendered self) which, in turn, has altered my teaching practice.

Through writing the self, I have found my identity is a map of all the forces that constitute my self: my gendered identity, the culture in which I was raised and currently live, and the relationships I have experienced that have either sustained me or harmed me. These forces are from both inside my self and outside. The inside is my memory, feelings, ideas, and beliefs, whereas the outside forces are, "based on the apparent esteem of others and on the myriad expectations that we early, even mindlessly, pick up from the culture in which we are immersed" (Bruner, 2002, p. 65). I found my identity by examining the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, and found my integrity by discerning which of those forces are integral to my selfhood, and in the end, I am of the opinion I have found life-giving ways of relating to the forces that converge within me (Palmer, 1998, p. 13).

I wrote, utilizing narrative inquiry and autoethnographic research which allowed me to write and acknowledge my own voice. By using my voice to write, and analyzing my own personal experiences, I altered the context of learning through research. Using my own voice as a method of research, in the end transformed my self.

How did I come to my findings? How did I explore my identity and integrity, and how did I discover my self had been transformed? I suggest it was the writing process in this thesis which was key, and the writing process is discussed below in further detail. Following this, I will discuss two key themes which emerged throughout my writing: 1) gender and how it has affected my identity; and 2) the dualistic culture in which I live, how it sustains power relations and how it has affected my self. These key themes converge through the forces that constitute my integrity. Some of these forces brought me life, while other forces zapped my life away. These will be explored in greater detail as well. Lastly, I will illustrate the importance of my self-disclosure in the transformation of my self, my practice, and my relations with others

PROCESS

The process of writing this thesis became a method of discovering my self and teacher identity. Richardson (2000) claims that writing is both a method of inquiry and a process of discovery (p. 236). I set out, not so much to find out if I have good management skills or organizational skills for classroom teaching, but to understand how the ways in which what I have learned in my life have become woven into who I

am, and how my life experiences have and will continue to influence my teaching and learning.

The writing process as well became a process of writing about my gendered self and my cultural context in such a way to alter my teaching practice and how I relate to others. From this thesis, I have really understood and experienced how writing can itself be a powerfully enabling and emancipatory form of practice, and I have developed a heightened awareness of the importance of writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). The writing was a meaning-making process for me.

My letters, using the voices of two "characters" (Caroline and Beth - - each of whom were voices of my self), were an 'interpretive device' for me - - a way of interrogating the relation between my individual experiences and theoretical problems (Anderson, p.112). The letters allowed my past reality to be written reflexively. Writing in this context, I used my current knowledge and understanding of education, gender and power issues, to focus on my past experiences and understand them in a new light. It opened up a dialogue between theory and practice for me. As well, the letters distanced me from my experiences so that I was able to view my self from the perspective of the "other" for the purposes of analyzing the letters.

I wrote the letters evocatively, using systematic sociological introspection. To gain an understanding of the letters after they were written, I used thematic analysis, "treating stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes that illuminate the content that hold within or across stories. The emphasis then is on the abstract analysis rather than the stories themselves" (Ellis, 2004, p. 196). After I wrote the letters, I went back and read through them, and was delighted to see connections and

threads emerging. As I re-experienced the situations described in the letters, and even as I wrote about the experiences, I was not aware how they were necessarily related to my identity, until after I stepped back, and began to look at these stories through thematic analysis. As I look back on my letters, written reflexively from systematic sociological introspection, I can see themes that influence my self at present, and my future self who teaches as well.

This analysis, this third and final section of my research was quite an interesting experience and journey. I enjoyed seeing the themes emerge. As Cole & Knowles (2000) state:

> The whole interpretive process can be exhilarating, kind of like panning for gold. You sift through heaps of sand and gravel to find the nuggets of knowledge that inspired the quest. Insights, understanding, and answers discerned through research have the potential to be highly provocative. Insights lead to more questions, which inspire further inquiry. And the spiral continues. And continues. The process becomes infused with other elements of your professional practice. Researching becomes an integral part of your teaching. As such, it can become quite seamless. (p. 93)

Using autoethnographic research methods was an exciting research process for me. I felt passionate and excited by each stage of the writing process, and I was constantly inspired to write. In using writing as a method of inquiry, I altered the very context of research, creating a truly transformational experience.

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

As stated earlier, I used thematic analysis (treating my stories as data and using analysis to arrive at themes) to gain an understanding of my letters and how they allowed me to explore and write my self. Initially, I identified several themes, but have since pared it down to two dominant themes:

1) Gender Issues; and
2) Dichotomous Either/or Thinking in our Dominant Western Culture.

These will be discussed below. Following this, I will conclude this thesis by identifying how my research, my writing and this analysis have been transformational and how this new knowledge will change my practice, and the ways I relate to others. It is in the conclusion that I will revisit the issues and power of research practices that are grounded in self-disclosure.

Gender and Power Issues

Complex issues of gender relations are illustrated in my stories. The stories illustrate unequal ways in which I and my mother were regarded due to our gender, and some of the ways she and I were constructed by this prevailing system of gender in our society.

In my opinion, the development of gendered identity is a central aspect of the development of my self. My gender underlies many of the ways that I and others identify with me socially and professionally, and it also informs my own deep

feelings about my "natural" self. I agree with McMahon (1995) who states: "gender comes to inform not just our social identities but also what we experience as our essential natures, or 'real selves'. What persons come to vest their feelings of real self in, of course, is deeply gendered. Self is a gendered process" (p. 24).

This quote is interesting because of its reference to essentialism. Essentialism means generalizing about the "nature" of particular human beings such as seeing women as natural mothers (Courtenay-Hall, 1998). Whenever we use categories or generalizations, the issue of essentialism is lurking in the background. As I revisit my letters and my reflections, I am often surprised to see language that still speaks to a certain measure of essentialism, despite my increased critical consciousness about the social construction of identity. It is as though essentialism seeps into our language, even as we resist it.

I concur with Swidler (1986) who assumes self can be partly understood as an expression of "culture in action". Swidler believes culture "influences action not by providing the ultimate values toward which action is oriented, but by shaping the repertoire, or 'tool kit' of habits, skills, and styles from which people construct strategies of action (Swidler as cited in McMahon, 1995, p. 25).

In examining how my gender has influenced the development of my self, and the ways my gendered experiences are illustrative of the society in which I live, I will discuss four gender sub-themes that emerged in my letters:

- gender casting and the sociopolitical significance of caring;
- mothering and personal fulfillment;
- gender enacted in institutional structures; and

- internal conflicts and tensions as a result of a gendered self.

Gender Casting and the Sociopolitical Significance of Caring

My letters illustrate how in many instances, myself and my mother felt the responsibility toward caring for others (particularly children, husband, and father).

In my letters, it seems that my mother unconsciously believed that her principal role was to serve my father, my sister, and I. For example, in my household, it was my mother who was seen to be the caregiver, and my father was seen as the bread-winner. Growing up, I quite willingly accepted the fact that my mother was the caregiver in my family, and often assumed that she would take care of things. When she didn't - - or couldn't (like when she herself was sick), I experienced a sense of disappointment with her for not rising to the challenge. For example, in my letters, I wrote about how I was disappointed with her for not looking after herself (before she was diagnosed with breast cancer). I also wrote about how I assumed that she would look after my dad and his alcoholism when he was first diagnosed. Only after writing this, did it occur to me, that this was a form of gender stereotyping.

Caroline wrote:

> *At that point I hadn't thought about her breast cancer recurring. I simply thought she wasn't looking after herself. She seemed malnourished, frail and weak – not at all like my mother who looked after my dad, loved to help with the babies, garden, cook, clean etc.*

> *My husband and I confronted my mother at the time. She agreed that yes, my father had been drinking too much. She told us of a series of incidents that made my husband and I conclude that my father was an alcoholic. We also confronted my father, and he agreed to slow his drinking down. I assumed he would do this, and I*

assumed that my mother would look after it.

My letters show how I assumed my mother was responsible for making sure that my father would be taken care of, and also that I found her guilty of not caring enough - - in the case of herself. However, I did not feel that the responsibility of caring was also my father's.

Caroline wrote:

She needed help administering the morphene so that she would not take too much. She needed help dealing with the pain. She needed help cleaning and looking after the house. She required around the clock care by my father, and he insisted that he was up to the task.

It is interesting how I wrote about my father being "up to the task" of caring for my mother. The assumption was not whether or not it was his responsibility, but whether or not he was up to the task – assuming that caring would not be the work of a man. Again, this is a gendered assumption.

In my memories, and in my letters, I assume that my mother did see her role as primary caregiver in the family, and felt guilty for leaving that responsibility with my father.

Caroline wrote:

She sat up and put her head on my father's shoulder. She told him she was sorry. He comforted her for a moment. She lay down and closed her eyes. We told her that we loved her, we told her it was time for her to rest. I held her hand and I watched her die.

Why was my mother apologizing? Did she feel that she was going to be letting my father and my sister and I down, that her illness was somehow her fault? Notice how I felt my mother had some sort of responsibility for my father's health.

Similarly there is evidence of my inherited compulsion to care for my father. The letters indicate how quickly I was to set aside issues of caring for my mother, and turn thoughts to my father.

Caroline wrote:

> *I was so consumed by my father's health, that it never even crossed my mind that my mother could have become ill.*

> *When my mom finally appeared to be well again, I quickly forgot about her breast cancer, but I was still consumed with my father's health. For some reason, I felt that a heart attack was more serious than breast cancer. So, every time something happened to my father, I went into a state of panic.*

> *I remember even going to visit my parents when my mom was sick, and before even going in to see my mom, I would I stop to shovel the walkway for my dad, just to help out, because I knew he was "burdened" by the fact that he had to look after my mother.*

> *We, and she, expected that her principle role was to serve others, in particular, my father and my sister and I. According to Carol Gilligan, women have been socialized to "devote themselves to the care and empowerment of others while remaining "selfless". (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 46).*

Why did I feel such a need to be so protective of my father? Why did I worry about him so much after he had his heart attack? Of course I know I loved him, but why did I worry so much about his food and exercise - - after all, he was a grown

man, and I would never have worried about my mother in the same way. Why did I do this? Why did I feel the urge to help him so much? Why did my mother feel the responsibility of looking after us all?

Examining my stories and writing in this way brings me to a closer understanding of what it means to have a gendered identity in our society. From examining my writing, I resonate with Gilligan who wrote: "Women are drawn to the role of caretaker and nurturer, often putting their own needs at the bottom of the list, preceded by other people, husband, and children" (Belenky et al, p.77). Both my mother and I were drawn into this role. We did this unconsciously but according to Wink (2000), whether we consciously or unconsciously accept these kinds of messages, we live them by accepting them (which we did) and are thus socialized to maintain these roles.

My letters illustrate just how unconscious one can be about cultural stereotypes. I now know, as a result of my writing and research, that this is an example of hegemony. The dominant male view in our society projected this image of caring so successfully, that I saw it as common sense, even as my mother and I were subordinated to it.

Courtenay-Hall (1998) has explored mothering mythology in the dominant western culture in the late 20th century. She writes about the myth of the natural mother. She explains "at its core, the myth of the natural mother involves the belief that women are naturally mothers - - they are born with a built-in set of capacities, dispositions and desires to nurture children; hence, mothering comes naturally to women (p. 2)". These beliefs are problematic because these beliefs originated in a

capitalist patriarchy, and they contribute to gender bias, sexist structures and essentialism in our western society (p. 2).

While caring for family does in fact have high personal value for me as well as many women, as I will discuss later, I have learned it cannot be ignored that there are often social and psychological costs associated with caring as outlined above. Not only can caring be an unfair burden on many women, it can also draw women into relations that reproduce hegemony, essentialism, hierarchies and subordination. Further, "caring" work is rendered valueless in our society and alternative approaches to caring for children receive little support in our society (McMahon, 1995; Courtenay-Hall, 1998). Experiencing these social and psychological consequences are a direct result of having a gendered identity. Now that I can name this, I can actually see the consequences of a caring role in our society.

Mothering and Personal Fulfillment

My experiences, as shown in the letters, illustrate there are socio-political costs associated with the role of caring that both my mother and I experienced as women. My letters also indicate a natural longing and desire to nurture and care for my children and family despite the socio-political costs. Wanting to care for my family is, as deMarneffe (2004) suggests, an important part of my identity. She explains "if we resist thinking about maternal desire, or treat it as a marginal detail, we lose an opportunity to understand ourselves and the broader situation of women. To take maternal desire as a valid focus of personal exploration is not a step backward but a step forward, toward greater awareness and a truer model of the self"

(deMarneffe, 2004, p. 6).

While I realize that for many women, mothering may not be about personal fulfillment (but rather about family or cultural survival as may be the case for women in poverty, minority women, women with disabilities, or women with abusive partners, for example), my own maternal desire and personal fulfillment is nonetheless significant (Courtney-Hall, 1998, p. 8). I resonate with Courtenay-Hall's quote which states

> On a suitably complex understanding of love, of individual, of bonding and of instinct, mothering as widely cross-culturally and historically experienced *is* about love and bonding between individual mothers and children in ways that are not simply learned, and in ways that run deeper for being life-long, for being intimate in number and for being outside the reign of institutional structures. (p.8)[italics added].

I recognize my privilege in the fact that I see and experience mothering as personal fulfillment and that having my children and caring for them as I have, has everything to do with the choices I am afforded through my socio-economic status. I don't feel a "duty" to mother my children, nor do I feel as though I have been brainwashed by media or society (although at times I likely am). It is the longing I feel to nurture and care for my family, to have a loving relationship with them, and to put my desire to care for them into practice. The privilege I have does not defract, although it may condition, my desire to nurture and care.

Indeed, my letters show the positive motivation to mother, in myself, and also in my mother – the authentic expression of self that we both brought to the task of

caring for our children. When writing about my mother's experiences as gendered, I was writing about those moments in the day-to-day life of every mother, illustrating how the deferral of their own gratifications or aims can be experienced as oppressive. But, a narrow focus on this, and the belief that those stories adequately capture my mother's whole experience of mothering, is not completely accurate. I know that my mother experienced pleasure in caring for her family, and felt satisfied spending her waking hours with the people she loved the most. This was evident at the time of her death, as I hope I have shown in my letters. I am certain that she too felt enormous gratification in caring for my father, and watching my sister and me grow, develop and change, graduate from university, get married and have children.

I too have felt similar gratification with mothering. My stories indicate that my children are one of the most central aspects in my life. Through motherhood I began to understand others, and began to feel truly powerful in who I am as a woman.

Caroline wrote:

> ***Education is my passion, and it was becoming a mother that made me see this more clearly. I felt compelled to focus my working and academic pursuits on understanding the most central issue in my life - raising children. My experience with motherhood allowed me to understand the nourishment we can give and receive from others, and the importance of connectedness through relations with others. It gave me a sense of wholeness in my life, and made me acknowledge my self in relation to others. Prior to having my children, I had never understood the importance of community as I do now, nor how our connectedness with others is such a vital part of life.***

Indeed, as deMarneffe (2004) explains, "maternal desire is not, for any woman, all there is. But for many of us, it is an important part of who we are" (p. 22).

While I wrote in my letters about a disappointing birthing experience due to a c-section, for the most part, I remember all of my children's births in a positive light. Each birth gave me a greater awareness of a deep connection to life, and I experienced a sense of a deeper reality in my life. I longed to be close with my babies, to nurture them and care for them. This is simply love for my children, a desire that comes from within. It is a part of who I am and because of it, I better understand the nourishment, love and caring that all children, and indeed, all people, need.

Rich (1976) in her book *Of Women Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, wrote: "Women's lives – in all levels of society – have been lived too long in both depression and fantasy, while our active energies have been trained and absorbed into caring for others" and yet, the energies trained and absorbed into caring for others are also the sources of the "trust and tenderness" that Rich affirms we need most "deeply and primally" from our mothers. Rich thus recognizes the love that children need from us, even as she identifies what giving that love costs women" (Rich, as cited in deMarneffe, 2004, p.31).

Gender Enacted in Institutional Structures

In spite of all the talk about equality in the workplace, the stories I tell in this thesis demonstrate how many institutional processes continue to exclude and hurt women.

Beth wrote:

My director started to ask me to leave boardroom meetings to make him photocopies (I was always the only female present, and it was I who he asked to make the copies). He would not allow me to prepare reports - he only allowed me to proof read his reports. He had me stay in my office and work on preparing applications but not speaking to the clients, and he had me preparing letters for his signature. Essentially I was working as his secretary. I found this work was not a challenge and I was bored. I began to dislike going in to work.

I desperately was trying to become part of his "boys club" but they wouldn't let me in. They had discussions each day in their offices about golf (a sport I don't play, so I didn't join the conversation), and while they discussed golf, they brought up other work issues too, but forgot to inform me of what was going on.

These stories are examples of what Smith (1987) refers to as institutional forms of women's exclusion. She states, "the exclusion of women from participating in creating the culture of the society is in this day largely organized by the ordinary social processes of socialization, education, work and communication. These perform a routine, generalized, and effective repression" (p. 26).

Indeed, the golfing chats were part of the regular workday in the office where I worked, and even my director's supervisor found nothing wrong with the way that I felt I was treated. Rather, the acceptance of the behaviour of the others and the behaviour toward me as a woman in the workplace, clearly shows how the exclusion of women was organized by the ordinary processes of work in my situation. Smith (1987) indicates, and I agree, in our society today we see less of the "rough stuff" when it comes to exclusion of women, but more of the steady institutional processes that exclude women. These processes may be less visible as an exclusionary force, yet every bit as effective (p. 25).

In institutional forms of women's exclusion, such as what I experienced, men often have authority, not necessarily because they have any special competencies or

expertise, but because they are representative of the power of institutionalized structures in our society (Smith, 1987, p. 30). As in my own case, I didn't even know it was happening to me until I wrote about the stories and analyzed them.

Moving into a career in education, and away from planning, I still have similar concerns about institutional structures and how it may impact my gendered identity. In my opinion, the teaching profession is not, exempt from such practices. In fact, the stories told by Brookes (1992), and Wink (2000) indicate that inequality continues to be practiced in the field of education.

Beth wrote:

> Through our correspondence, I have become increasingly aware of the ways in which gender and power relations affect our lives as women. I am also aware that the educational discipline is not free of power relations. In fact, I have read "of particular concern to many feminist educators who take seriously the plight of 'women and girls in schooling' is the ongoing opposition to and undermining of feminist work through sexist, patriarchal and phallocentric knowledge systems which militate against women in the academy" (Luke & Gore, 1992b, p.193).

Feminist researchers have attempted to expose the exploitation of women's labor in the teaching profession, both in the academy and in the work of teachers more broadly and have provided evidence to suggest that female university teachers are exploited as workers, "are overloaded with administrative responsibilities, encouraged to function as caregivers, and given responsibilities which may lead to their exclusion from an equal chance of success as "professionals" (Dillabough, 2000, p. 333).

In referring to female university teachers, Acker and Feurverger (1997) write:

> [Women academics] experience a "bifuricated consciousness" (Smith, 1987) or "segmented self" (Miller, 1983) or "outlaw emotions" (Jagger, 1989) as they try to live up to the contradictory prescriptions for "caring women" and productive academics. They see themselves as working too hard, with high levels of anxiety, in reward systems that they dislike and without sufficient recognition for the aspects of the work they care about or have to do. Although self-selection may play a part in producing the anxiety and perfectionism demonstrated by many of these women, we have argued that their "outsider status" in academe, combined with narrow institutional criteria for success, result in a situation where they suffer considerable pain (Acker & Feurverger (1997) in Dillabough, 2000, p. 333)

I agree with Luke and Gore (1992a) that as a woman, I stand hip-deep in a culture saturated with institutional structures ruled by men. Further, it is a concern that moving into education, despite it historically being known as "women's work" or a "caring" profession, it still largely remains in the "theoretical and administrative custody of men" as Luke and Gore (1992a) describe.

Internal Conflicts and Tensions

My gendered experience in my workplace was not an experience of choice. As Luke & Gore (1992b) state, "a "woman's battle with the procedure and structure of institutionalized patriarchy is part of a much larger war zone so many women are

engaged in – a war not of their making" (Luke & Gore, 1992b, p.206). Through examining my letters, it was apparent that I had to "go to war" publicly with the men in my office, but it was not a path I would have chosen, nor is it a path that many men would have ever experienced. As mentioned above, having to "fight" for equality, is not something that many men ever experience in their workplace, yet I did.

Beth wrote:

> My husband, was very supportive and encouraged me to take the issue to the union and the human rights commission. After many discussions with lawyers and union people, I won, and signed the forms the day my son was born while I was in the hospital. I received a monetary settlement and a personal letter of apology from that director, but on that day, as I sat and read his letter with my new baby in my arms, I vowed that I would not return to the planning profession after my maternity leave, or ever again. At the time, of course, this decision was made out of anger and humiliation, of not wanting to be back in the planning community. Yes, I knew that I had won on paper, but in my mind, I knew I lost.

> While I did win the grievance I filed, and was asked to return to my position, I quickly declined. How could I ever return to that workplace again? I felt the tension that would have likely existed between myself and the other men in the office would have been unbearable, not to mention the anger they would have felt toward me for disrupting their "boys club". Looking back now, I am glad that I did leave, as the experience has led me into new and exciting changes in my life, but at the time, it certainly felt as though I had no real choice in that decision.

The humiliation of having to prove my worth at work, and having to "prove" how embarrassing it was to have my boss viewing pornographic web sites of women, is not an experience many men have. Marx suggests "[People]...make their own history, but do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances directly chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. " (Marx, as cited in Britzman,

2003, p. 41).

I agree with Britzman (2003) that this can indeed provide insight into the problems of social change and constructing emancipatory relationships from an oppressive past. To change one's situation often does require a "fight." I suggest this is exactly what I did after my experience with my 'oppressive' manager. I decided that I could not accept silence and inaction and I resolved my solution - I decided to fight. From then onward (with no plans to stop!) I have consciously constructed actions and relationships that told my story and supported my side of the argument (and at least in the short term, I won!). I strongly believe the emancipatory feelings I enjoyed were also felt, although in a different sort of way, by my manager and other males in that workplace; a small example of social change?

My letters as well indicate how having a gendered identity can impact our experiences with education. My letters show education offered me personal promise, and yet it was also a threat to me and mother. In the letters I wrote about my mother wanting to pursue a career in art and her being encouraged by her parents and guidance counselors to pursue a career in nursing instead as this was quite common for women of her generation.

Caroline wrote:

> *My mother was an artist and a creator, but she was discouraged from following her passion. She was told by her parents and by the career counsellors in her high school that there were no careers in art, and that she should do what most women do, and that was become a nurse.*

I assume that pursuing art would have been seen as a "selfish" path versus nursing, which likely was seen as a "self-less" path. I am of the opinion my mother was constructed in a society that imposed certain expectations around gender roles. Women were often raised at the time to believe that "to get something for oneself is abhorrent and selfish because others are bound to be deprived as a result" (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 77).

My mother attended school in the late 1950s, at a time when girls were encouraged to go into lines of "women's work." The school system in fact regulated gender by directing boys into shop and girls into home economics. Boys were often sent off to college while girls went into commercial programs (Pinar, 2002, p. 363). My mother's experiences were directly related to her gender and the society in which she lived at the time.

I always made the assumption that my schooling and my family life resulted in a completely different experience for me than my mother's. I went to school in the 70s. "During the 1970s, there was a widespread cultural sanction of self-indulgence, self-actualization, and opportunism. Promotion of self was in vogue and assumed the status of a new social phenomenon, being tagged the 'me-decade'" (Belenky et al, 1997, p. 78). I felt growing up that gender inequality was a thing of the past. I had grown up in the "Free to be You and Me" generation - - I was told that I could be anything I wanted to be - - it didn't matter if you were male or female. I knew that at school, if I studied hard, I would find a good job. I never once considered that my gender had impacted my identity, my self. I had been schooled to believe that my opinions and knowledge in the workplace should have counted just as much as a

man's opinion, and that I should have been treated as professionally as the men were. In my experience, I wasn't treated the same and this was a disappointment to me.

Beth wrote:

> You also asked in your letter if I felt I was submissive and capitulating because of gender expectations. Likely there were times when I was submissive, because it was so obviously the expectation around the office that I would be doing the more submissive work such as photocopying for the men in the office. This was a disappointment to myself, the fact that it even existed and was accepted practice in the workplace.

In my letters, I wrote about being disappointed with myself for not being able to fit in to the professional work environment that I was in. I wondered why the men were able to succeed but I had not.

Beth wrote:

> Never in my life had I felt so low, so pathetic, like such a loser. I felt I was stupid, that I couldn't write, and that in fact, I couldn't do anything.

> I felt that I couldn't live up to my own expected standard of a professional woman - that I was a disappointment to myself, and probably even to my parents. After all, I went to University, I was trained in the job, but why couldn't I keep up to the men in my office?

I found this quote by Lewis (1992) to be helpful in understanding my disappointment with my work situation:

> "It is common today for education to be ideologically dressed as the pathway to a new kind of romance for women, the romance of a "career", a profession, a middle-class way of life; the image is one of a well-dressed woman doing "clean" work, important work. As such, it feeds her

> yearning, her desire, for a way out of the "working class" life she has known. It is precisely because education holds out this promise for women that it also poses a threat to them in their everyday lives" (1992, p.171).

The threat has everything to do with the illusion of power and control associated with the dream of education. When I said I felt stupid and couldn't do anything, I realize now, it's not that I was stupid, but rather I felt stupid and guilty for not being able to live up to my own expected standard of what a professional woman should be like. My schooling taught me that as a female, I had choice, but my experiences taught me that there are certain societal expectations around gender roles. It was as Lewis wrote - - my education and society held out a promise for me that I could do as well as any man in the planning profession, but it was because of this promise, that I was so ultimately disappointed in the end for not being able to live up to it.

Lastly, my letters illustrate the conflict I feel internally as a result of being both a mother and a working woman. When I first started out in a career as a young woman, I believe I had internalized a representation of what a working mother was like in the past, and I set out to do things differently. I wanted to be a professional career woman, to do it the same as the men I had studied with. Yet, when I assumed a maternal role, things became more complicated for me. It was no longer just my self that I was concerned with - - I was a mother. I wanted to be at home with my

children more than anything, and yet I also wanted to be true to myself, and my work. This presented me with an internal conflict.

Beth wrote:

> I felt that I was being continuously watched and monitored, my work was demeaning and no longer challenging, and my director made my work place dismal. Working with this kind of stress each day was starting to affect my performance - and it certainly was affecting my home life. I couldn't go home each day and feel happy about my work, and I spent many nights complaining about my situation to my husband. To top it off, this was the first time that I had been separated from my baby, and I couldn't believe that I had to leave him each day, to go to this job to do something that I hated. It didn't seem fair that someone else was being paid to do something that I would have loved to do, which was to look after my baby, and that I had to go and work for this Director whom I despised each day for making me feel so horrible.

I am of the opinion that what I felt is what deMarneffe (2004) describes as a "thwarting of self" (p. 50). She states "a mother can feel she is not truly living her life or being herself if she feels deprived of the time and emotional space to relate to her child" (p. 50). I know from my own personal experiences how this was true in my life, and my internal conflict grew increasingly stronger when I was working in a position I didn't enjoy. deMarneffe assumes all mothers share this common predicament of dealing with conflicts in their lives – of dealing with having babies and the daily activities of mothering. While I convince myself that working is best, the reality for me is that I am torn, and so I live with this sense of internal conflict.

Courtenay-Hall (1998) suggests "the obstacles and tasks that mothers face would be less imposing if the myth were not so strongly in place to begin with, both in their lives and in their societies" (p. 6). Courtenay-Hall describes the dominant discourse of motherhood in our western culture as the "myth of the natural mother".

This dominant discourses tells us that children are innocent and priceless, that their rearing should be carried out primarily by mothers, and that they should be raised in a nuclear family (Courtenay-Hall, 1998; O'Reilly, 2004a). The dominant discourse on mothering portrays mothering as natural for women, and the image it is based on portrays the mother as predominantly white, middle class, married, and usually as a stay-at-home mom (Courtenay-Hall, 1998; O'Reilly 2004a). As Courtenay-Hall suggests, this normative discourse is communicated through literature, art, film and media and thus touches the lives of most women in our western culture (p. 7).

Indeed, it has touched my life. Because I am white, middle-class, and married, I pretty much fit the mould of a mother defined by the dominant discourse on mothering, except for one exclusion: I am not a stay-at-home mother. The dominant discourse on mothering depicts mothering as a "natural" experience of motherhood, and to do otherwise is to be "unnatural" (Courtenay-Hall 1998, O'Reilly, 2004a). I am a working mother by personal choice, and also for economic reasons, but not fitting the idealized image of a mother causes me to have internal conflict. As Friedan (1963) wrote, "There is a strange discrepancy between the reality of our lives as women and the image we are trying to conform" (Friedan, as cited in O'Reilly, 2004a, p.11). Perhaps I would not feel such a tug toward mothering, if I didn't feel guilty for not meeting the cultural norm of being a stay-at-home mother for my children, as depicted in parenting magazines, children's shows, etc..

Examining the internal tensions and conflicts in my letters and my experiences, convinces me that the experiences of women today continue to be couched in gendered and sometimes oppressive contexts. Since no mother can possibly achieve idealized motherhood, women may bring to their lived experience of mothering self recrimination, anxiety and guilt (O'Reilly, 2004a, p.16). Indeed, as hooks (1994) states, "there is no one among us who has not felt the pain of sexism and sexist oppression, the anguish that male domination can create in daily life, the profound and unrelenting misery and sorrow" (p. 75). Why I wonder must we as women deal with internal tension resulting from our work, educational and mothering experiences, and more importantly, why hasn't the situation changed after all these years?

Dichotomous Either/Or Thinking in our Western Culture

Examining my letters, it became apparent to me that I live in a society dominated by dichotomous, either/or thinking (Belenky et al., p. 7). My letters illustrate examples of this way of thinking in:

- Illness prevention (I think diseases such as breast cancer and alcoholism are seen as the problems of individual bodies that need medical attention rather than perceiving them to be social problems, requiring social solutions due to the ethos of self-responsibility and self-control that permeates our western culture) (Denzin, 1997; Rosser, 2000);
- Public versus private interests;

- The paradox of mothering (both a woman's strength and weakness); and
- The predominant separation of theory from practice.

I think we need to balance these paradoxes. Favouring one interest over others, seems to come as a huge cost and detriment to others. In my opinion, all voices need to be heard, and all voices are equally important.

From my perspective, it is important to see how these tensions interrelate - - to tease them apart, and also pull them together. I think individual standpoints, individual realities (such as maternal thinking) are positive grounds for theorizing about our lives, for resisting patriarchal oppression or power issues resulting from binaries in our society. This will be discussed further below.

CONCLUSION

I agree with Palmer (1998) and Cole & Knowles (2000), "Who is the self who teaches?" is one of the most fundamental questions we can ask about teaching. Thus, the focus of this research has been to enhance how my understanding of how my identity emerges through reflecting on my experiences. As Palmer states, "by addressing it openly and honestly, alone and together, we can serve our students more faithfully, enhance our own well being, make common cause with colleagues, and help education bring more light and life to the world" (p. 6).

Yet finding self is a challenge. As Bruner (2002) states "there is no such thing as an intuitively obvious and essential self to know, one that just sits there, ready to be portrayed in words. Rather, we constantly construct and reconstruct ourselves, to

meet the needs of the situations we encounter, and we do so with the guidance of our memories of the past and our hopes and fears for the future. Telling oneself about oneself is like making up a story about who and what we are, what's happened and why we're doing what we're doing" (p. 64).

Indeed, I have found through this research, that my identity is an ongoing emergent experience, grounded in my memories of relationships. As my relations and experiences changed my life, my identity shifted, and altered. As such, I see my experiences as learning experiences, and what I learn cannot be taken from me.

The process of writing this thesis, in addition to recognizing my possibilities and limitations, also contributed to something I had not set out to initially, and that is a transformation of self. Through the act of writing the self-disclosing letters, I was actually able to reconstruct my self by exploring my memories and experiences in a new light. I realized it was not so much the experiences themselves that were transformative for me, but the act of telling - - of giving my experiences a *voice*, and then seeing how using my *voice* in the future will benefit my self and others. The process of writing transformed me, changing my view of my emergent teaching identity.

Examining the themes in my self-disclosure, I found a common metaphor emerged - - the metaphor of *voice* for empowerment. While I was able to see what limits me in my thematic analysis, it was not until I discovered the metaphor of *voice* that I recovered my own possibilities and power within my self.

Traditionally power has been thought of negatively, as that which limits, prohibits, refuses and censors. Shrewsbury (1987) however, has redefined power in

"positive" terms, suggesting we view the concept of power as energy, capacity, and potential rather than as domination, thus recognising people need power, "both as a way to maintain a sense of self and as a way to accomplish ends" (Shrewsbury as cited in Orner, 1992, p. 83).

Indeed, from my perspective, my writing in this thesis has given me a *voice*, and enabled me to see how I can use this *voice* as potential and power, to accomplish my possibilities and maintain my sense of self.

In my work as an educator, I as well want to create contexts and situations where students are empowered to correct the silencing of people in our culture at large. I want to help them find and articulate their *voices* as I have found mine. This won't necessarily be an easy task because as Wink (2000) indicates, "courage is related to voice; it takes courage for some to express their voice. Voice is the use of language to paint a picture of one's reality, one's experiences, one's world" (p. 70). Grumet (1988) described how when she used her *voice* in a conference to describe her memory of birthing her child, she felt that she had desecrated the privacy and utter specificity of her relation to her children, yet at the same time she also believed by withholding information about that relation from the public discourse of educational theory she would be denying her own experience and knowledge. She states our silence certifies "the system" and we become complicit with theorists and teachers who repudiate the intimacy of nurture in their own histories and in their work in education" (p.xvi). If I can encourage my self and others to talk, listen and share our stories, it is my hope we can begin to dismantle relations of power, and also find the power within ourselves as individuals to meet our potentials.

Utilizing my *voice* allows this thesis to be a primary document for feminist research, as it both presents and also analyzes my experiences as a woman in the world in which we live, illuminating several aspects of what it means to have a female gender. This can be transformational, not just for my self, but also for my readers or my students. Stories are important in revealing peripheral vision and drawing connections and patterns, allowing readers to think of their own parallel stories (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 28). hooks (1994) claims she is grateful to the women and men who self-disclose in order to "give use their experience to teach and guide, as a means to chart new theoretical journeys" (p. 75). She finds their self-disclosure to be liberatory. She goes on to say "personal testimony, personal experience, is such fertile ground for the production of liberatory feminist theory because it usually forms the base of our theory making" (p.70). Indeed, according to Smith (1997), by utilizing narrative writing as I have done, and sharing my experiences through self-disclosure, I am helping to dismantle the sociological discourse that maintains its hegemony over experience. Writing about my personal experiences, I have directed my inquiry to begin from the position of a woman, and I can explicate some of my experience as a sociological problematic (p. 99).

The idea of using personal practical knowledge has strong parallels to the writing of Gramsci, a theorist who advocated a philosophy of praxis - a dialogue between theory and practice, thought and activity, knowledge and experience:

> A philosophy of praxis...must be a criticism of "common sense," basing itself, initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that "everyone" is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing

> from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making "critical" an already existing activity. (Gramsci as cited in Britzman, 2003, p.69)

Using *voices*, from my perspective, is a way we can transform the existence of the gender binary and the power relations in our culture.

By attempting to combine my experiences with motherhood with my research and employment as an educator, I believe I have found a space between being connected and separate - - a place that I can call my own. By bridging the two, I feel more of a connection between these two domains. I consider the connection to be a positive thing especially because I see motherhood as positively affecting my work and vice versa. I agree with deMarneffe (2004), that even when work is deeply satisfying, it does not banish or dispel the pain of leaving my children each day with another caregiver (p.50), yet my work as an educator is also a part of who I am. I will never stop loving, caring, or worrying about my children, but there are times in my life when I need to be separated from those I love. Making that separation comfortable and liveable for us all, allows me to feel I have succeeded. I did not come to this understanding however, until I used my *voice*. I needed my *voice* to see that I was not happy working as a planner. I voiced my concerns after my mother's death about doing something in life I felt passion for, and this caused me to move into the field of education. Talking to myself internally, listening to my *voices*, worked in helping me find this balance in my life between the domains of working and motherhood.

My mothering experience further enhanced my knowledge of wholeness and connectedness, and raised broader questions with me about the nature of social bonds and social responsibility. Motherhood, as McMahon (1995) describes, symbolizes connectedness, caring and interdependence - - ties that socially bind rather than divide. Through the *voice* of Caroline, I too wrote about my experience with motherhood and how it allowed me to understand the nourishment we can receive from others, and the importance of connectedness through relations with others. Looking through the lens of women's perspectives as mothers and hearing the *voices* of mothers, conclusions can be drawn that can have positive implications in our society. Motherhood is much about moral identities and motherhood provided me with an opportunity to claim personal growth and development and to think of myself as a morally enhanced person. McMahon (1995) believes motherhood is "expressive of the sorts of things we think of as being important in society and the sorts of persons we like to think women (and men) are capable of being" (p. 264). Making a society more caring is of course not grounded in maternal identities, but listening to the voices of mothers, and experiences such as mine, may help others learn more about interdependence in our culture. We need to focus on these issues, and less on autonomy and independence - issues we already know a great deal about (Belenky, et al., 1997, p. 7).

Using women's *voices*, we can also work to dismantle ruling relations existing in institutional structures. I didn't have the language to articulate and name the gender-specific experience I wrote about in my workplace. I tried to name the experience with my supervisors but they didn't listen. I felt shame for having to tell,

embarrassed it was somehow caused by my own in ability to get the job done. I still struggle with this experience, but I am improving. I now know I had no *voice* in that environment. It was the male dominated *voice* that was used, promoted and valued. My *voice* was discredited with a wave of a hand. Having to sit in office meetings to only be asked to go out to photocopy, I felt my opinions and my thoughts were silenced. I did not know it at the time - - I just felt anger for being subordinated and asked to do "women's work." I know I will again encounter difficulties with gender and power, and the division between theory and practice. My hope is to one day Teach at the University level, and I know at that level, most full time faculty members are men. I know the dynamic of silencing may occur there as well. This time however, I hope to be aware of it, and attempt using my *voice* if I feel silenced in situations - - to name my experience. Indeed, critical pedagogy calls me to name these experiences.

From my perspective, using *voice* can work toward dismantling dichotomous structures in our culture as well. The dialogue between Beth and her professor - - Caroline - - is an example of a non-hierarchial relationship between student and teacher. Each "character" was learning from the other. The teacher Caroline was not the "expert" but rather, they both were experts, having knowledge of their own experiences, and helping one another to understand the self and other through the sharing of these stories. As Palmer (1998) indicates, we know reality only by being in community with it ourselves (p. 97), but in a community there are no ultimate authorities, but rather it is about sharing knowledge and experiences. Being "in community", we can dismantle relations of power. As hooks (1994) states "When

professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators. It is often productive if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussion so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material" (p. 21).

I assume women's bodies are much too influenced by technology and medicalization in our western culture, and this emphasis is causing our culture to lose women-centered birthing experiences. As women, we are increasingly impacted by medicalization of our experiences. From my own experiences, I can see almost every stage of reproduction is wedded to technology and medicalization: conception (sperm banks, invitrofertilization, and birth control pills); prenatal development (ultrasounds and amniocentisis); and birthing (fetal monitors, c-sections and epidurals). O'Reilly (2004) states birth should relate to physical, emotional and mental experiences of women, yet birthing is instead treated as a form of production, viewing the birthing woman as a machine. "If a woman's labour does not meet the medical rate of 'normal' progression, the doctor, as supervisor, manager or foreman, must intervene and 'speed up production' through the implementation of 'time-saving' equipment and 'short-cut' methods" and the mechanistic metaphors of medical discourse suggest the achievement of technological intervention is not so much improved safety as increased production" (p. 32).

I suggest women need to use *voice* to displace the dominant ideology of birth so that it becomes an empowering experience for women.

> We know so much about pregnancy and childbirth and yet the medicalization of childbirth does little to alleviate the fears that women have – fear of the pain, fear of the power and fear of the unknown. Perhaps the twenty-first century will find maternity care incorporating the social and emotional concerns of mothers within the definition of childbirth as a holistic event in women's lives. (Speier, p. 150)

From my perspective, we can incorporate social and emotional concerns by sharing and listening to stories and *voices* of mothers.

My own self-disclosure in this thesis allows me to see how easily the power relations caused by either/or thinking may be dismantled by the use of *voice*.

I see from this thesis, I have been constructed in a society committed to individual progress over concern for marginalized people or the welfare of our communities or our environment. Dillabough (2000) suggests "Identities conditioned by the forces of individualism are, by necessity, operating under a 'logic of exclusion' where the 'other' in teacher education becomes what the prescribed identity is not" (p. 346).

I believe we need to honour paradoxes in our society. Thinking this way may be more complicated than the existing method of thinking the world apart, but as Palmer (1998) states "When we think things together, we reclaim the force in the world, in our students, in ourselves" (p. 66). Writers such as Palmer and hooks (1994) suggest we need to stop thinking the world apart. They suggest we embrace opposites, and recognize interrelatedness in our culture. In my opinion, we can do this by challenging the models of human development that emphasize the importance

of individualism and autonomy, as these models don't serve social interests (McMahon, 1995). We can move beyond these dualistic perspectives to acknowledge multiplicity, and focus on forces that interact (Britzman, 2003, p. 237). I assume we need to use our *voices* as women, and individuals and share our stories and experiences. Through my own letters, I see how my ways of knowing and maternal thinking can be positive grounds for theorizing about our culture and women's lives in general (McMahon, 1995, p. 10).

I assume using *voice* can help our culture move from viewing illness as a predominantly individual concern, to more of a social concern. I wrote in my letters about my focus on well-being. This is a direct result of my fear of not wanting to have diseases end my life at an early age. But what I now realize, is that perhaps what is most troubling for myself and most people in our society, is our belief that prevention is dependent on our own individual lifestyle choices, rather than the social, economic, political, and environmental changes needed to avert these diseases. We do need to practice healthy eating and exercise as individuals, but as a society we must also change. We must do more to reduce pesticide use and encourage more organic produce and products in our grocery stores, we must do more to eliminate trans fats in our foods that are known to cause illness and cancer, we must do more to improve our bad societal habits such as alcohol excessive consumption and smoking. People need to be better informed. People need to be encouraged to act. Illnesses are neither an individual or societal problem - - they are both. I think our society needs to start recognizing these connections. I suggest we need to do more to support one another in our culture - - to be more in community and more holistic as opposed to

always encouraging individualism. Talking with others, sharing fears is a way of being healthy too. It is also a way of understanding and learning about the illness experiences of others.

Lastly, I suggest by using *voice*, we can better intersect theory and practice by relating our own experiences to theory. From my research, I have realized the act of theorizing is not about imposing abstract theories upon various conditions, but rather it is a form of engaging with the world. Theory lives in our practical experiences (Britzman, 2003, p. 69). The point I have learned therefore, is not to offer the personal and the theoretical as contrasting, but to see their implication in each other (Anderson, 2001, p. 125).

Initially, I wondered if my personal stories in this thesis would have any theoretical value. But *voice* gives me a new understanding of how the personal and the theoretical can intermingle. According to Belenky et al. (1997), "Women repeatedly used the metaphor of voice to depict their intellectual and ethical development; and that the development of a sense of voice, mind and self were intricately intertwined" (p. 18). The self I am now, is both the same and yet different to my self that began this thesis. My self has been formed through my experiences, and also through the writing process of this thesis. As such, my thesis shows how in practice, and theory, what it means to live and work with a different notion of the self - - one that is affected by gender and culture, and one that has also been transformed.

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