

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

**A Quiet Place: Listening and Pedagogy**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

As teachers we often understand listening as a cognitive ability. This hermeneutic study explores the need for a different understanding of listening. Through the use of children's literature, poetry, interviews, personal experience and selected written works, this study examines listening as a pedagogical act.

We often neglect our own listening and the merit of finding of quiet places and silence as places for cultivating listening. Openness in listening is required for us, as teachers, to hear and understand in a more generous fashion. This is explored through Heidegger's concept of *Gelassenheit*, an openness to listening.

Listening as the part of the reciprocal relationship between the young and the old is presented in this study. And, everydayness (Heidegger, 1996) is explored as a way to lead us to an authentic understanding of daily life. In addition, listening to the limits of teaching method as a way of opening up the conversation between teachers is explored.

Hearkening (Levin, 1989), a listening which understands, is a part of this study. Hearkening leads us toward the value of the guiding concepts of humanism and understanding the character of pedagogy. Finally, curriculum as story and the importance of memory in listening conclude this study.

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## DEDICATION

To my husband, Gord.

Your support, understanding, sacrifice and wisdom are invaluable to me.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Epigraph.....	viii
INTRODUCTION: THE SPACE BETWEEN THE SPOKES: CREATING SPACES FOR LISTENING.....	1
CHAPTER ONE: REDISCOVERING THE IMPORTANCE OF QUIET PLACES.....	13
A Quiet Place.....	14
The Importance of Quiet Places.....	16
Stopping and the Limitations of 'Mine Own Hand'.....	18
Solitude and Inner Listening.....	21
Correct Discipline.....	23
Time as a Bringer of Gifts.....	25
CHAPTER TWO: <i>GELASSENHEIT</i> .....	30
<i>GELASSENHEIT</i> : Silence as Pauses in a Musical Piece.....	31
<i>GELASSENHEIT</i> : Let the Notes Sound Forth .....	35
<i>GELASSENHEIT</i> : In Search of Harmony Through the Question.....	37
Clearing Spaces.....	42
CHAPTER THREE: <u>SOMETHING FROM NOTHING</u> : LISTENING TO PEDAGOGICAL RELATIONSHIPS.....	45
A Retelling of <u>Something From Nothing</u> .....	47
Multi-layeredness.....	49
Judgement and Phronesis.....	50
Dwelling Within a Conversation.....	52
Welcoming.....	55
Stopping to Listen for a Genuine Encounter.....	59
Pedagogic Relationships: Finding a Place.....	61
The Material of <i>This Precious Earth</i> .....	64

CHAPTER INTERLUDE: A SPACE BETWEEN THE CHAPTERS: LISTENING TO THE <i>EVERYDAYNESS</i> OF BEING.....	70
Everydayness.....	71
Idle Talk.....	71
Curiosity.....	73
Ambiguity.....	75
Falling Prey and Thrownness.....	76
CHAPTER FOUR: CREATING BLOOM THROUGH ATTENTIVE LISTENING.....	78
Creating Bloom.....	78
Practice, Theory and Attentive Listening.....	81
Opening Up Understanding in Teaching Methods.....	85
Understanding Teaching Methods Differently.....	88
Method as Closing the Conversation.....	88
Method, Margin and Wilderness.....	90
The Permeability of Language.....	93
CHAPTER FIVE: LISTENING TO ANOTHER QUIET PLACE.....	100
Limits to Openness.....	100
Hearkening: A Listening Which Understands.....	102
Hearkening and the Character of Pedagogy.....	103
Guiding Concepts of Humanism.....	105
<i>Bildung</i> .....	105
Tact.....	107
Sensus Communis.....	108
Heedful Circumspection.....	110
Fusion of Horizons.....	111
CHAPTER SIX: LISTENING AND MEMORY.....	114
Lengthening of Memory and the Character of Pedagogy.....	114
Curriculum as Story and the Lengthening of Memory.....	118
EPILOGUE: THE SPACE BETWEEN THE SPOKES REVISITED.....	123
Gathering Places.....	124
Listening, Caring and Remembering.....	125
The Difficulty of Application.....	126
The Story Goes On and On.....	128
REFERENCES.....	133

Taking place within the family, the neighbourhood, the school, places of work, and in all the other contexts of daily life, these interactions - communicative interactions - are ultimately *dependent* on a finely tuned sense of harmony and consonance: a respectful sense of what is needed, what is called for, what is appropriate. Good mothers are familiar with this 'sense'. So are good teachers and good psychotherapists. The forming of this sense is connected with the cultivation of our hearing: listening through the inner and outer ears. The outer ears we understand a little; the inner ears - that is to say, listening as a capacity of the body in its ontological wholeness - we understand virtually not at all. . . .the future of humanism depends on our listening.

David Levin, The Listening Self: Personal Growth, Social Change and the Closure of Metaphysics



## INTRODUCTION

### THE SPACE BETWEEN THE SPOKES: Creating Spaces for Listening

We put thirty spokes together and call it a wheel;  
But it is on the space where there is nothing that  
the utility of the wheel depends.

We turn clay to make a vessel;  
But it is on the space where there is nothing that the utility of the  
vessel depends.

Therefore just as we take of advantage of what is,  
we should recognize the utility of what is not.

(Lao Tze cited in Fiumara, 1990, p. 102)

I begin from a quiet place, a place of silence. The silence in  
which listening is embedded is a quiet space where there appears to  
be nothing, *the utility of what is not*, the space between the spokes  
on the wheel.

I have struggled with where to begin this interpretive study  
over the course of many months. I realize that I have pondered  
these ideas for a long time and have been waiting to discover a place  
to begin. Gadamer says that, "It is true that interpretation has to  
start somewhere, but it does not start any where. It is not really a  
beginning" (1994, p. 472). I begin as a teacher in the middle of  
things, in the classroom, in the world. There is no easy place to  
begin. I write from a quiet place, a place of listening and

contemplation of the work I do as an elementary school teacher.

I begin with the opening, the space between the spokes. A space filled with silence. It is a silence of contemplation. A silence that opens up a space and allows for spaciousness. A space often filled by language and noise. A space that, in our culture, we overflow with busyness and details. A space crowded with information which demands our attention. But, as the wheel depends upon the space between the spokes, so does our ability to write in interpretive work.

Writing interpretively becomes both difficult and wonderful, "the lovely agonies of this sort of interpretive writing" (Jardine, 1994, p. vii) spring forward. In completing the research and the writing for this thesis I have felt the tension of this "lovely agony". Then "the question becomes one of how to write in such a way that the writing gives up the notion of having a center or foundation" (Jardine, 1994b, p. v). I write differently than I learned to write previously in my academic life.

This writing becomes like a tapestry with various threads woven into the text. I have experienced the "losing and finding" (Jardine, 1994b, p. vi) of these threads in my research and in my writing. "We have all been trained to believe that this 'losing and finding' way of reading (and writing) indicates either a mistake in the text or a mistake in ourselves. We are not accustomed to such 'comings and goings'" (Jardine, 1994, p. vi). I write with the joy and frustration of *losing and finding* and with a sense of the *comings and*

*goings* of my experience as a reader, a writer and a teacher of children.

This thesis is about listening well to carefully proceed in decisions which involve educating children. My experience in the classroom, and as an elementary corrective learning teacher of children in grades two to six, informs my study of listening. In addition, interviews with children and a local school administrator, life experiences and readings are research components for this thesis. Through the interviews, I include the voices of children, as their voices resonate in the background of all of this research (Jardine & Field, 1996, p. 256). The school administrator whom I interview is central to providing a voice with a viewpoint from the realm of practical daily experience in schools. Her voice offers a space for listening to insights from someone who is no longer a classroom teacher, but who works with many teachers.

I also employ children's literature and poetry to open and interpret aspects of primary education, such as the nature of the relationship between old and young, the taking for granted of "everydayness" (Heidegger, 1996), the place of pleasure in teaching, and understanding teaching methods differently. These devices are the substance of my inquiry and form the spokes of the wheel. Children's literature and poetry are central devices in this study of listening and pedagogy. In the words of Timothy Findley:

Books are mediators between our desire and our despair. They bargain for us in behalf of our sanity and survival. Maybe "bargain" isn't quite the right word -- but they set down questions and arguments that, by their very nature inside fiction, prompt us to think again about our response to being alive. It is only inside fiction, where evil is incarnate and dragons can still be slain, that we perceive the possibility of surviving reality. (Findley, 1990, p. 188)

Children's literature and poetry become *mediators* of this hermeneutic research and are read to open up understanding through the examination of pedagogical images.

One could characterize contemporary hermeneutics as an effort, against dogmatism, to read texts into their full ambiguity and thus to read texts *generatively*, out into the open. This is why hermeneutics tends to become focused on occasion on etymologies and semantic plays and cross-figures. (Jardine, 1994, p. 90-91)

In addition to children's literature and poetry, this thesis is centered upon philosophical concepts from Gadamer and Heidegger. These will be taken directly from their texts and from the interpretation of current scholars in the field.

One such important premise from the work of Gadamer and Heidegger is that of *aletheia*.

Heidegger argued, in *Being and Time*, that truth in the sense of "correctness", the truth, namely of the correspondence theory, phenomenologically *presupposes* another sense of truth: *aletheia*, unconcealment. Before it can be a question of correctness, something must be, must appear, must disclose itself, must sound forth. But this unconcealment of beings can happen only when, and only where, there is a hermeneutical opening, a clearing silence, a field of tonality laid out for

disclosure. This essentially prior event of openness and clearing, of ontological difference, is the primordial moment of truth, the hermeneutical *aletheia* without which there can be no experience of truth in the sense of "correctness" or "correspondence". Before we can *hear* the truth, we must be *open* to listening. (Levin, 1989, p. 244-245)

The gap in the wheel, the space between the spokes is the place where interpretive work springs forth. It is this place on the wheel where there is space for *aletheia*. Yet, this space is surrounded by the spokes, the structure which gives it form, substance and shape. It is composed of our present theories and knowledge as educators.

If we permit an opening, a gap, a space between the spokes, then we may be able to discover a different interpretation of listening. The nature of listening as finding an opening, or unconcealment, came to light when I first began graduate studies. I had been a grade one teacher for a number of years. I arrived with the intention of researching more effective strategies for working with students in the area of early literacy. I arrived with certain assumptions about children and literacy learning. I felt that there were different methods and strategies, that I lacked knowledge of, to quickly and successfully guide children to literacy. I arrived with a traditional understanding of listening and pedagogy.

What I have since discovered has been a journey that I would not have anticipated. A comment from my advisor made me stop and rethink my current assumptions about the nature of children, teaching and learning. I had researched and written a paper about early literacy teaching methods that I had handed in to him. As we

discussed this paper he remarked: "You have to prove to me that early intervention for young children isn't just another way of speeding things up." The nature of my discovery and the direction of my learning took a radical turn after that conversation. It created an opening. The space between the spokes came forward. Thus the opening is sometimes the result of *hap* (Weinsheimer, 1985) and is forced. The opening is often not one we plan for. It happens in spite of our wishes. Hap, "makes its presence felt when one happens onto something, in the haphazard guess, the happenstance situation, in happiness and haplessness. . .for better or worse, hap cannot be avoided, it eludes the hegemony of method" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 8). Gadamer says hap is what occurs to us beyond our willing and doing (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 8) and it opens a space for *aletheia*. Hap reminds us:

of the primordial unity of self and world that method, however rigorous, is not entirely able to break up. For this reason, hap points the way home--or rather, is already there. When we happen upon something true, something that possesses an immediate certitude, though it cannot be methodically certified, then we already belong to and participate in the *Geschehen der Wahrheit*, the happening of truth. We belong to history. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 15)

With the eruption of hap, I opened up my understandings of pedagogy. I learned to listen differently.

openness does not exist only for the person who speaks: rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 361)

This openness and listening has taken on significance in my studies and in my research. I listen differently and with a new form of rigor. "The hermeneutical experience also has its own rigor: that of uninterrupted listening" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 465). This listening is difficult. "Thus listening requires work" (Wilde, 1996, p. 90). This listening recognizes that we, as teachers, have difficulty understanding our assumptions and their limitations.

The actual work that teachers do is not always supported in the language that teachers have at their disposal, in the metanarratives, the big, taken for granted assumptions about teaching. . . .sometimes teachers forget that they have tacitly assumed certain things, and some of these assumptions may actually undermine their work. (Wilde, 1996, p. 2)

These assumptions that may undermine teachers' work are based upon concepts of modernity such as individualism, instrumental reason and the political consequences of both (Taylor, 1991).

Listening, well, then becomes unlikely if we do not give the time and space necessary to the challenge of opening up and allowing new understandings to come forward. Aletheia guides this listening and provides a way to understand and uncover some of these assumptions and the complexity which exists in teaching.

Perhaps we need to consider teaching in terms of this complexity, opening up our eyes to the way our assumptions

colour the way we understand it. Perhaps we need to recognize that some of our assumptions may not support and sustain this work. (Wilde, 1996, p. 2)

And, in the course of our everyday interactions in teaching, this complexity and these assumptions are often invisible. As they should be. But, in the event of hap (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 8), the invisibility of our assumptions begins to reveal itself. The complexities come to bear and we, as pedagogues, begin to examine assumptions which we take for granted when making pedagogical decisions.

Creating an opening and encouraging a different way of listening to how we understand and apply theory is where the space between the spokes is important. The gap between theory and practice is an important place for interpretive work to reside.

This study is about listening in a different way than we have historically understood listening as educators. It is also about silence and quiet places, the need for gaps, for slowing down, and listening carefully to what is needed to respond well in particular pedagogical situations. It is about the openness required to consider the complexity of the task of pedagogy.

In this study, I explore the listening stance needed to generate the language, the relationships and the ideas to understand teaching reading and writing in a broader context. Understanding the act of teaching differently may help in providing literacy programs with greater meaning and relevance to young learners. This requires a



quiet place that allows us to press aside the numerous demands in a teacher's daily life and to create a gap from which to grow and learn.

This study explores quiet places for ourselves and our students and the necessity and value of silence, solitude and contemplation. And, this work is about caring enough to become open to listen well to the learning and the discoveries that may enable us to proceed carefully into the future: "the more one listens the more one is absorbed by an awareness of the fragility of our doctrines and of the fertility of a Socratic 'wonder'" (Fiumara, 1990, p. 191).

The space between the spokes is where this wonder may be fostered, where the clearing may bring forth an understanding of pedagogy which will be generous to children and teachers. This space validates an understanding of pedagogy which may be guided by metaphors of ecology (Fiumara, 1990), (Berry, 1987) and invites planting, persistence, tenacity and patience before cultivation may occur. The fragile relationships within which teaching lives are validated within this space.

In Chapter One, I introduce a piece of personal writing, "A Quiet Place" to highlight the importance of inner listening. Silence, solitude and the concept of sabbatical, are presented from the work of Wendell Berry and Parker J. Palmer and applied to teaching. In this chapter, I discuss the importance of being able to listen to ourselves before we can listen well to others. Ideas based upon the work of Fiumara (1990), Jardine (1996), Palmer (1993) and Levin (1989) are

presented. I address the concept of time in relation to listening in a generative manner. The first space in the wheel is introduced in Chapter One.

In Chapter Two, I bring forward *Gelassenheit*, a concept from the work of Levin based upon the findings of Heidegger. This listening is not merely an intellectual competence but affective and motivational as well (Levin, 1989, p. 43). This chapter asks us "to practise a thinking hearing: a thinking which listens, a listening which is thoughtful" (Levin, 1989, p. 17). I discuss *Gelassenheit* as a listening openness in search of obedience to understanding pedagogical situations. "Listening with *Gelassenheit*, however, we are drawn into a *different* obedience; our listening plays obedient as a lute that waits upon the touches of the wind" (Levin, 1989, p. 235). Levin outlines the significance of *Gelassenheit* in his book The Listening Self: Personal Growth, Social Change and the Closure of Metaphysics. My thesis is guided by Levin's work on listening.

The theme of Chapter Three is listening to each other in relationships. "But what scholars now say--that what good teachers have always known--is that real learning does not happen until students are brought into relationship with the teacher, with each other, and with the subject. We cannot learn deeply and well until a community of learners is created in the classroom" (Palmer, 1993, p. xvi). A children's book, Something From Nothing, is central to the discussion of listening to each other. Listening in relationships forms another space between the spokes of the wheel.

The next chapter, entitled Chapter Interlude, is a space between the chapters. Mother, from the story Something From Nothing, is presented in the light of Heidegger's (1996) concepts of the everydayness of being. I create this space to highlight the elusive quality of our inauthentic existence. In realizing the significance of inauthentic existence, we begin to understand authentic existence and its value in our pedagogical lives.

Chapter Four discusses the concepts of bloom (Berry, 1987) and attentive listening as ways to teach by cultivating the educationally misunderstood phenomenon of pleasure. This chapter opens a discussion about teaching methods and the conversation that exists between colleagues. What is the nature of that conversation and does methodology close rather than open the listening space? Attentive listening creates a space between the spokes of the wheel. This listening works towards hearkening.

Chapter Five discusses hearkening as a listening which understands situations and limits. Guiding concepts of humanism are presented in this chapter as ways to proceed in a character of teaching which relies on limits, the openness of *Gelassenheit* the presence of attentive listening and the wisdom of hearkening.

Lengthening of memory and teaching curriculum as story are explored in Chapter Six. These concepts are presented as a way to listen differently and to slow down the frenetic pace of today. These ideas promote a listening understanding which is formed through the cultivation of memory and remembering.

Just as spokes give the wheel its substance, philosophy and theory give this thesis its substance. The spaces between the spokes enable listening to bring forward and uncover (aletheia) some ways teaching may be understood differently.

In researching and writing this thesis I survey a large expanse of the horizon of pedagogy. I do this to open up some of the taken for granted aspects of elementary school teaching. Because of the breadth of this endeavor, I am able to sketch out the wheel and its spokes using deft and detailed strokes in some sections, and lightly dusting over other sections to keep this study a manageable size. Each of the chapters in this work invite additional study which may be completed in future work.

Stories require us to listen. "Stories carry the wisdom of elders and give a sense of one's place in the life of the people" (Steinhart, 1995, p. 322). In the service of understanding teaching/pedagogy differently, this thesis of listening centers around stories. It centers around stories of classroom life, children's literature and other people's stories. In our information laden society we often forget the significance of emoting and storying. In the quiet places of story live the gaps for us to listen interpretively and understand the *comings and goings* of pedagogy.

Finding quiet places is of considerable importance in understanding listening, to ourselves and others differently, as pedagogues, going into the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER ONE

### REDISCOVERING THE IMPORTANCE OF QUIET PLACES

"To teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced." (Palmer, 1993, p. 68)

I remember a comment made by one of the teachers on my staff the morning I was awarded a sabbatical. It has remained in my mind as I set out in graduate studies.

My principal handed me *the* letter to tell me of my acceptance or rejection for the sabbatical. I sat down, after the children had gone for recess, hoping to enjoy a few minutes of peace and quiet to read the letter. I opened it and was elated by the results. I had been chosen. I went to the office to tell my principal and then I stopped in the staffroom. The resource room teacher had been previously awarded a sabbatical. She said: "Oh, the best part is the quiet. Reading and studying and the quiet of sitting in your house is so peaceful. You'll just love it!"

The idea of the quiet and the peace was important to me. After eleven years of teaching young children, the quiet place of a sabbatical was very enticing. That summer I attended the first university course that I had taken in years. One of the assignments was to bring a piece of personal writing to publication. I chose a piece of writing from my journal. It is about a quiet place at my grandparent's farm in rural Saskatchewan.

### A Quiet Place

I remember being nine years old. Every summer I would go out to my grandparents' house in rural Saskatchewan. The rest of the year, I lived in a small, crowded house in the big city. I looked forward to going to the quiet town where they lived. To wonder. To explore. To be. In the huge expanses of the Saskatchewan countryside it felt like there was room to grow.

Early one morning, I set out after helping grandma with the dishes. I smelled the dampness of the back porch that had been added onto the side of the house. It led to the basement which was once a crawl space. All of the grandchildren, aunts and uncles, had helped to clear it out, using a huge conveyor belt, so grandma and grandpa could have a cellar.

The porch always smelled of damp earth. Not a sour smell but the healthy, earthy smell of nature. There were empty paint cans full of old toys, tattered work smocks hanging on hooks, and other pieces of junk collected from my grandpa's job as town maintenance man. It was an interesting place for a nine year old to explore.

On this particular morning, one of those precious July mornings in Saskatchewan, where thirty below January days seemed so far removed, the out of doors beckoned me. I opened the door. The sky, the expansive blue sky, was the first thing I noticed.

Then, I looked down to the old marsh that was five hundred yards behind the house and beyond the dilapidated, gray chicken coop. I often went exploring near the overgrown marsh finding

frogs, cattails and dragonflies. But, this particular morning, I had a hankering to explore the wooded area adjacent to the marsh.

The morning sun filtered through the clouds making the dew sparkle on the tall stalks of wild grass. I sauntered through the unbounded backyard which made my city yard look like a toy box. It was as if I was drawn to the spot. An amphitheater in the morning woods. A gap in the trees. A place of peace, beauty and solitude.

There, as if by woodland magic, I saw this place. Tall, spindly trees encircled the old stump where I sat down. The sun filtered through the leaves showing slivers of light as the slow morning breeze wafted from the old marsh into this woodland.

I had been near this place many times. Yet, it was undiscovered until this morning. I felt instantly attracted to the spot. A quiet place. To relax. To dream. To be. The quiet place where my spirit could sing in silent harmony with the woodland.

Many years have passed since that morning. Yet, I often go back to revisit this quiet place in my meditations. The image is gently etched in my memory. Now, when I long for a place just to be, a place without the hurry-scurry troubles of daily life, I am again in this quiet place. And as the sun filters through the leaves showing the slivers of light, while the slow morning breeze wafts through the woodland, I find peace.

### The Importance of Quiet Places

If silence gives us knowledge of the world, solitude gives us knowledge of ourselves. The two disciplines are obviously related. If we are to receive reality as it is, we, the receivers, must be in good operating condition, well tuned and free of internal static. In solitude we discover and correct the self-distortions that prevent us from receiving God and the world as they are. (Palmer, 1993, p. 121)

The significance of the silence and solitude of "A Quiet Place" has since become illuminating. As my experience of being a graduate student unfolds it sheds greater meaning to my experience of being a teacher of elementary children. This significance takes the appreciation of quiet and solitude as necessary in our post-modern condition. When I read the following quotes, they speak to me.

Today's classrooms, particularly at the elementary level, are postmodern places in the sense that the dizzying array of projects and activities that prevails everywhere constitute a kind of cosmic dance which has its own justification and animus and does not ultimately depend on formal curriculum mandates from the ministry of education. In other words, whether one is studying dinosaurs or math problems seems secondary to the primary interest of being engaged in activity itself. Indeed, like "dead air" on the radio, the possibility of students having nothing to do is the inspiration for many teachers' worst nightmares. Planning is taken to mean assuming full responsibility for filling up time and space to full capacity - giving taxpayers full value for the dollar.

The result is a certain air of distraction, and a rather compulsive quality in the actions of both teachers and students. Even more serious though, and this leads us to further insights from the postmodernists, especially, J. F. Lyotard, is the consequence of cultural amnesia taking root in the midst of



everything, a certain forgetfulness of purpose, or a deepening difficulty in identifying how or whether the activities fit together in any meaningful way. Discernible in some quarters is even a certain loss of care for the project of integration itself. In Lyotard's terms, this is precisely the character of the postmodern condition namely the loss or the end of the "grand narratives" which in former times united all human action in the Western tradition around great themes such as Truth, Redemption and Enlightenment. (Smith, 1994, p. 69-70)

Manic pace is cultivated as a virtue in elementary schools. Teachers getting kids to run from place to place, activity to activity. All noise and no *sounds*. Quiet is undervalued as only the quiet of straight rows - *made to be* quiet by somebody, not *being* quiet. (Clifford cited in Jardine, 1996, p. 49)

These quotes "touched a chord" (Taylor, 1991, p. 13). They addressed me. "Understanding begins. . .when something addresses us" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 299). After teaching for the past fifteen years, the noise, the activity and the busyness have become a part of my daily life. I feel this need for quiet and a slower pace to be a part of my own subjectivity.

The buzz, the noise and the activity of primary classrooms signifies something beyond the teacher and students in a particular classroom. The lack of quiet and space is part of our post-modern condition where stopping is often viewed in a negative manner, like dead air space on the radio. "The ability to attend to ourselves, to our students, to our collective lives depends first and foremost on a form of *stopping*, and the creation of a space in which we can truly listen and hear ourselves" (Smith, 1994, p. 76). By stopping, we give

ourselves the opportunity to understand our lives, as pedagogues, with depth and wisdom.

For example, a school administrator points out, when discussing professional development, that her staff slowed things down to allow for the important issues to surface in conversation, listening and writing. This was in an effort to avoid the traditional trivialization of professional development which results from trying to rush through too many topics during the course of professional days throughout the school year. This staff stopped to listen in spite of the usual rush of things. And, by doing so, have created a space to *truly listen*. As a closing note of interest, this staff has stopped to study curriculum, in this way, for a period of five years.

### **Stopping, Silence and the Limitations of 'Mine Own Hand'**

We cannot do to children what we have not already done to ourselves (Clifford and Friesen 1994). We cannot deepen their wisdom of and attention to the Earth and its ways until we have first taken on the work of this wisdom and attention ourselves. (Jardine, 1996, p. 54)

As we realize the importance of deepening our own wisdom and attention we may begin to stop. The need to stop and listen to ourselves is not one which is done in a self-centered way. It is in the cultivation of silence that we become open to listening. "Silence is our listening openness: in order to hear something, we must first give it our silence" (Levin, 1989, p. 232). This need for silence calls for slowness and the necessity of Sabbaths or sabbaticals.

Wendell Berry outlines the importance of sabbaticals in the essay "Two Economies". In this essay, he discusses the difference between the Kingdom of God, which he refers to as the Great Economy, and the humanly controlled industrial economy. In this essay, he offers the following quote which relates to stopping and the need for taking sabbaticals as teachers. Wendell Berry, a former teacher, is now a farmer in Kansas.

My point is that, to facilitate both water retention and drainage in the same place, we must improve the soil, which is not a mechanical device but among other things, a graveyard, a place of resurrection, and a community of living creatures. Devices may sometimes help but only up to a point, for soil is improved by what humans do not do as well as by what they do. The proprieties of soil husbandry require acts that are much more complex than industrial acts, for these acts are conditioned by the ability not to act, by forbearance or self-restraint, sympathy or generosity. The industrial act is simply prescribed by thought, but the act of soil building is also limited by thought. We build soil by knowing what to do but also by knowing what not to do and by knowing when to stop. Both kinds of knowledge are necessary because invariably, at some point the reach of human comprehension becomes too short, and at that point the work of the human economy must end in absolute deference to the working of the Great Economy. This, I take it, is the practical significance of the idea of the sabbatical. (Berry, 1987, p. 66)

In education we want to do the best for children. And, sometimes, as pedagogues, we need to remember to stop. Stopping has power to let us know our own limitations and, if well listened to, can help us act with pedagogical wisdom (van Manen, 1982).

Berry cautions, "too great a human confidence in the power of

mine own hand" (1987 p. 56) can cause damage. "The Greek name for the pride that attempts to transcend human limitations was *hubris*, and hubris was the cause of what the Greeks understood as tragedy" (1987, p. 56). In education the confidence *in the power of mine own hand* can impact our actions as issues such as accountability become a major concern.

For example, the backlash of the current achievement tests, now published in local newspapers, can serve to commodify children's learning. Achievement tests can have a positive effect on education, but the other side of the issue is that pressure is brought to bear on teachers to look good through the achievements of the children. Decisions are made to assure this favorable rating and the power of *mine own hand* is over inflated. Stopping or taking sabbatical is not seen as important.

In addition, Berry tells us, "A similar purpose was served by the institution of the Sabbath, when, by not working, the Israelites were meant to see the limited efficacy of their work and thus to understand their true dependence" (1987, p. 56). We need to stop and take sabbaticals as pedagogues in the service of educating children. We need to honor the importance of quiet places which may help us to understand the limitations of *mine own hand* through solitude.

### Solitude and Inner Listening

I have had the painful realization that it is always first *my own* attention and devotion to the world and its ways that is at issue, my own ability and willingness to pursue experiences that deepen as they proceed, and to refuse, when I can, as I can, experience-as-activity, experience-as-distraction. Hard work. "Real work," (Snyder, 1980) with all the deep pleasures that ensue. (Jardine, 1996, p. 54)

The need for solitude and silence is a necessary phenomenon of our western culture. We must cultivate silence in ourselves before we are able to deepen our wisdom of pedagogy. This, as Jardine points out, is hard work. "Cultivating silence, however, is extremely difficult in our time. The more it is needed, the more it withdraws, giving way to the noises of modern living that cut us off from its teachings of wisdom" (Levin, 1989, p. 232). Levin also adds:

There is also a deafness which shields us against a deep-seated ontological anxiety - little deaths from moment of moment; and this is a deafness to silence, a listening which constantly insists on making noise, or surrounding itself with other people or audio equipment, in order to fight off the horror of a 'deathly silence'. For many people, silence is the sound of death; its open quality, a clearing where there is nothing for hearing to hold on to, is an experience of unbearable anxiety, and not the gift of a resting-place, an *Aufenthalt*, for the quiet recovery of the weary soul. (Levin, 1989, p. 79)

Due to the lack of silence and a lack of appreciation for silence, a "benumbment" (Fiumara, 1990, p. 84) befalls we who live in these times. Benumbment is described as the numbing of the human being to inner listening. Fiumara discusses the current propensity for

information overload which tends to make all information equally insipid. It is a closure of one's mind or keeping one's mind occupied and full with sure solutions; no time is available for openness and possibility (Fiumara, 1990, p. 87).

In one way, benumbment has a positive function which helps us to survive the inundation of information and carry on. In its negative sense, benumbment leads us away from ourselves and inner listening. The messages from the outside take the place of our ability to stop to listen to ourselves in a profound way.

Solitude and inner listening cultivate a spirit of creative living with harmonious relations to ourselves, to others and to nature.

The work by which good human and natural possibilities are preserved is complex and difficult, and it probably cannot be accomplished by raw intelligence and information. It requires knowledge, skills, and restraints, some of which must come from our past. In the hurry of technological progress, we have replaced some tools and methods that worked with some that do not work. But we also need culture-borne instructions about who or what humans are and how and on what assumptions they should act. The Chain of Being, for instance--which gave humans a place between animals and angels in the order of Creation---is an old idea that has not been replaced by any adequate new one. It was simply rejected, and the lack of it leaves us without a definition.

Lacking that definition, or any such definition, we do not know how ambitious to be, what or how much we may safely desire, when or where to stop. I knew a barber once who refused to give a discount to a bald client, explaining that his artistry

consisted, not in the cutting off, but in the knowing when to stop. He spoke, I think, as a true artist and a true human. The lack of such knowledge is extremely dangerous in and to an individual. But ignorance of when to stop is a modern epidemic. (Berry, 1987, p. 15-16)

Stopping is necessary for elementary teachers of today. In teaching young children how to read and write, we can see the necessity of solitude and stopping in the use of *knowledge, skills and restraints* when making pedagogical decisions which serve the community.

As Palmer points out: "community requires solitude to renew its bonds; solitude requires community to express and test those bonds. If we live at one or the other pole of the paradox, we sacrifice either the inward content or the outward form of truth itself" (1993, p. 122). It is within the space between the solitude and community that correct discipline is fostered.

### Correct Discipline

I once taught a boy who we shall call Carson. From the beginning of his school life, he experienced difficulty learning to read and write. He was hardly able to hold a pencil, and was very tentative about his place as a student. Carson received early intervention assistance using current and popular methods. Eventually, he learned to read a little. But, in spite of this, after three years, Carson continues to have difficulty reading and writing.

Would it have been better to treat Carson differently? Instead of constant surveillance and extra help from well intended sources,

could we have treated him with greater openness and listening? Pedagogically, what would have been a wiser way to proceed? Could he have shown us what he *could do* in different ways? This would have required the opening of a space around which we could have proceeded with "correct discipline" (Berry, 1983, p. 70).

Proceeding with correct discipline is a difficult thing to do. Correct discipline comes from wisdom accumulated over time. "'Correct discipline' and enough time are inseparable notions. Correct discipline cannot be hurried, for it is both the knowledge of what ought to be done, and the willingness to do it--all of it properly" (Berry, 1983, p. 70). And a good worker knows, even after work is done, additional time is required to improve it. The study of the consequences of the work is important to gain deeper understanding (Berry, 1983, p. 70). To benefit from the consequences one "must understand them by living with them, and then correct them, if necessary, by longer living and more work" (Berry, 1983, p. 70). Pedagogically, if we stay to understand these consequences, we can continue to do good work.

But, "distraction is inimical to correct discipline, and enough time is beyond the reach of anyone who has too much to do" (Berry, 1983 p. 71). As elementary teachers there is much to do. The job is demanding, and there is a measure of haste in teaching children to read and write.



### **Time as a Bringer of Gifts**

Time, which can not be seen, touched or controlled by following it as we choose, is nevertheless capable of paralyzing humans with boredom or disintegrating them with haste. (Fiumara, 1990, p. 140).

I have been in education during the transformation of the curriculum field from the behaviorist orientation to the whole language movement. I have heard competing voices which demand attention and consideration. It is how, or if, we listen to these voices that impacts our pedagogical choices for children like Carson. Distraction results from listening to too many of these competing voices and hurrying children like Carson into literacy.

In times of budget restraint and decreasing public support, life in the classroom begins to speed up with each passing year. It is how we understand time that becomes important. In primary education, our understanding of time becomes one which embodies haste. Haste to bring children like Carson to literacy in the shortest space of time.

Our conception of time becomes key in creating a quiet place. If our concept of time is a linear and mechanical one, then we see time as always running out. We understand time as a place for haste. If we live in this conception of time our experience is frustrating and causes unrest. Levin discusses our "straight arrow character of time" (1989, p. 262). He reveals the segregated understanding of time as a source of suffering because it is broken free of the past and the future.

This time-order of our social life is, as such, a cause of suffering, because it installs us in a present, a 'now', that is essentially self-contained: isolated from 'its' pasts and discontinuous with 'its' future, this 'present' is supposed to be rich and full, since it is protected by segregation from loss, absence, dissemination. But in truth, this atomic now-point is thereby *emptied* of meaning - a present which somehow is never really present, never really lived. (Levin, 1989, p. 262)

This parceled up understanding of time is the underlying metaphor for time in our schools today. For example, much energy is spent, at the beginning of each school year, allocating chunks of time in time tabling. This focus on time parcels minutes up into blocks of curriculum time for each subject. But, as teachers, we know, in the real life of pedagogy, time sometimes does not usually go according to the timetable. The complexities of everyday intervene and we must allow space for the inclusion of other factors which may change our plans. The segregated understanding of time by time tabling, if not listened to carefully, can become an *atomic now-point* without connection to past and future.

Understanding time is a fragile and important part of our daily lives. Time, viewed industrially, becomes a commodity which we need to use up by filling every space. Then, time is full and running out. In schools, time is full and running out. There are numerous activities which fill the calendar of the school year. Theme days, special celebrations, bake sales, sporting events, performances, meetings and many other activities fill our days. But, if we run to the mechanical view of time, our lack of time is set up as a rationale for making things faster and faster.

With regard to haste - our irremediable lack of time - the situation is not very different since technological advances are geared to develop instruments designed to make everything faster - growth, exchange, elimination - and thus to 'save' time or delusionally even 'produce' it. We are in the presence of a triumphal advance upon time, of an inconsiderate race against something that we no longer acknowledge and therefore do not even think of respecting. . . .an annulment of the time spent in waiting. (Fiumara, 1990, 133-134)

But there are times when something strikes us, even above our "wanting and willing" (Gadamer, 1994), times that we must stop to listen. We are forced to open up our theories and our assumptions to something we do not understand. Therefore, instead of haste, we may understand time differently. In a generous sense of time there is a stronger continuity between past, present and future. There is a time that can be slower and more spiritual.

In the essay, "People, Land and Community", Wendell Berry discusses understanding time differently.

Perhaps it is only when we focus our minds on our machines that time seems short. Time is always running out for machines. They shorten our work, in a sense popularly approved, by simplifying it and speeding it up, but our work perishes quickly in them too as they wear out and are discarded. For the living Creation, on the other hand, time is always coming. . . .For the farm built into the pattern of living things, as an analogue of the forest or prairie, time is a bringer of gifts. These gifts may be welcomed and cared for. To some extent they may be expected. Only within strict limits are they the result of human intention and knowledge. They cannot in

the usual sense be made. Only in the short term of industrial accounting can they be thought simply earnable. Over the real length of human time, to be earned they must be deserved. (Berry, 1983. p. 76-77)

Levin also suggests that there is a differing way of being in time. He explains:

The Zen experience is a moment of 'vagabond' listening: a moment when we are radically open to whatever may sound forth---whatever the timing of temporality may give. It is a moment of 'just listening', akin to the practice of 'just sitting', i.e. *zazen*. It is possible if and only if we have broken the spell of everyday timing and reversed our inveterate tendency to press ourselves into the time of a specious present---a present made so full, so self-sufficient, so purely and totally present, that it is actually, in the final analysis emptied of all meaning, isolated from its past and futures. (1989, p. 266-267)

If we are open to *just listening*, time can include the past, present and future. We no longer live in the running out of the present. In this sense of time, educators may be able, now and then, to step back and *just sit* or *just listen*. If we can experience this "letting go and letting be" (Levin, 1989, p. 262), we may understand the wisdom of what Wendell Berry suggests when talking of replenishing fertile soil for cultivation, "for soil is improved by what humans do not do as well as by what they do" (1987, p. 66). As teachers, we need to learn to be still, before we can help children like Carson.

Children like Carson are pressed into a present that is full of extra help and constant surveillance for a future that is supposed to be better. This attitude is well intentioned, but it does not recognize

the significance of holding back some of the time, of listening, and of the careful cultivation of correct discipline. Time is used to its fullest, pressing forward and offering literacy instruction for children like Carson. And, could it be that children like Carson are best instructed by what teachers do not do as well as what they do? Quiet places, silence, stopping, solitude and the limit of *mine own hand* live here in a generous sense of time. A time which opens up "a space for obedience to truth by listening" (Palmer, 1993, p. 68) for the benefit of teachers, and students like Carson.

## CHAPTER TWO

### *GELASSENHEIT*

"achieving *Gelassenheit*, the wisdom of 'just listening'. . . *sets the tone* for our hearing." (Levin, 1989, p. 246)

Levin introduces us to the concept of *Gelassenheit* through his study of Heidegger. Levin outlines four stages of listening and qualifies that these stages are a way of understanding the developmental character of listening. They are not to be seen as linear and straightforward. He offers them to guide the study of listening and states that a person may move between the stages depending upon personal situations.

Levin's four stages of listening begin with *Zugehörigkeit*, a listening we experience as infants open to everything, stage two is a listening that meets the demands of everyday living, stage three is developing "listening as a practice of compassion, increasing our capacity, as listeners, to be aware of, and responsive to, the interrelatedness and commonality of all sonorous beings. This stage recognizes the importance of reciprocity to others and the cultivation of sensibility, a deepening of our capacity for sensuous and affective appreciation" (Levin, 1989, p. 47-48) which form the basis for our compassionate interactions with the world.

In the fourth stage Levin suggests that *Gelassenheit* is necessary as a way to open our listening. It is similar to stage one,

but it is a mature openness to listening. It is a self-disciplined and difficult process which is spiritual and open to changing our understandings. *Gelassenheit* is a prerequisite to hearkening. Harkening is a listening which understands situations well.

Pedagogically, when considering how to proceed with children like Carson, many of us teachers have difficulty with stopping and listening openly. Levin asks, "can we achieve a different experience of the order of time by developing our capacity to hear? In other words, does a different experience of time begin to form as we begin to learn *Gelassenheit* in listening" (1989, p. 259)?

*Gelassenheit* suggests understanding time and listening in a different way. It asks us to listen openly. In the particular instance *Gelassenheit* can be illustrated. Three individual vignettes from teaching experience serve to illustrate *Gelassenheit* along with a collection of quotations from Levin's work.

### ***Gelassenheit: Silence as Pauses in a Musical Piece***

In *Gelassenheit*, we let go of our attachments, our object fixations, and we open ourselves to the field of sound as a whole, understanding that, by virtue of this openness, we are giving thought - returning thought - to the openness of Being as such. (Levin, 1989, p. 229)

*Gelassenheit* asks us to listen to language like it is a musical piece. We allow ourselves to be open to the piece as it plays itself out. But to complement the words in language, or the notes in music,

are the rests. The silence, on which the piece depends, makes all the difference.

Silence, achieved in classrooms, has characteristically been viewed as a forced silence. Children are expected to be quiet when they are attending to assigned tasks. In the traditional sense, this is a way of forcing children to appreciate the discipline required to learn. However, silence, thought of differently, can be a generous space in the classroom. Teacher, students and curriculum can dwell in cultivated silence. Silence can be a way to enhance the understanding of language and to encourage its generativity. Christa Fox, from the University of Calgary, raises the issue in her Master's thesis:

Silence in classrooms is often viewed as being negative. Silence can be considered to be a form of resistance and, at times, a form of punishment. In school, children do not have a voice when it comes to being silent. Most often, teachers either demand silence from students or demand students to speak. Legitimate silence has a place in the world. Legitimate silence is a significant way of being in the world. To understand what it means to be silent in a classroom would help to open up an understanding of the customs and traditions that fill the gap between silence and talk. (Fox, 1996, p. 151)

Cultivating silence makes a difference in the learning of children. After reading this work by Christa Fox, I decided to focus differently on silence, in the classroom, with the children, from the beginning of the school year. This particular school year in my Grade Two classroom began with a discussion of the quiet places of the summer. I chose to use children's literature to accentuate this



different understanding of silence. Owl Moon, by Jane Yolen, is an effective story in presenting the children with the realization that sometimes one needs to get quiet for very good reasons which are not imposed, but which are important. These reasons include discipline, inner listening, attending to the natural world and a stopping for quiet time. We related silence and discipline as important for learning curricular material. The listening that resulted was *heedful* and *obedient*, the listening of *Gelassenheit*.

'Obedient as a lute'. . . . This is not an imposed obedience; nor is it the obedience of conformity. It is the obedience of letting, freely, spontaneously, joyfully yielding. In Latin, 'obedience' is *obaudire*, the obedience of 'listening from below'. In German, 'obedience' may be translated by *Horchsamkeit*, a listening that is heedful. (Levin, 1989, p. 224)

In Owl Moon, the little girl learns the importance of obedient silence and quiet for attending to the natural world. Owl Moon is a story about a little girl who lives in the rural United States. It is winter and this young girl is now old enough for her father to take her owling, a rite of passage for this particular family. Pa has taken her older brothers owling and the girl has been waiting anxiously for this honor. The night is a memorable one for the girl and anyone who reads this story. That night there is a bright *Owl Moon* which lights the walk to the forest where the owls dwell:

It was late one winter night,  
long past my bedtime,  
when Pa and I went owling.  
There was no wind.  
The trees stood still

as giant statues.  
And the moon was so bright  
the sky seemed to shine.  
Somewhere behind us  
a train whistle blew,  
long and low,  
like a sad, sad song.  
I could hear it  
through the woolen cap  
Pa had pulled down  
over my ears.  
A farm dog answered the train,  
and then a second dog  
joined in.  
They sang out,  
trains and dogs,  
for a real long time.  
And when their voices faded away  
it was as quiet as a dream.  
We walked on toward the woods,  
....  
But I never called out.  
If you go owling  
you have to be quiet  
that's what Pa always says.  
I had been waiting  
to go owling with Pa  
for a long, long time.  
(Yolen, 1987, p. 2-6)

Finally, after walking and calling for a long time, the owl comes. Pa shines his flashlight on the great horned owl. And, for a moment, time is suspended as they stop in silence and acknowledge each other.

This story set a reverent tone in the classroom. The children began to understand silence and the need for silence differently. As

a result this group of children could discuss concepts in a very open and cultivating fashion. They could listen and play with possibilities in curriculum learning. They showed through their interest, participation and attention during our class discussions that they understood the reason for the discipline required in curricular learning.

Together, some of the time, we could all find the place where silence and language blended to make our collective understanding rich and engaging. This story and our classroom discussions about silence and quiet places, laid a firm foundation upon which to build the years' study. Many times during the year we discussed the quiet deliberation of this little girl and her pa as they were searching for the owl. We, too, searched for the owl as we studied and explored. We continued the school year searching for quiet places in which to learn, dwell and just be, as in *Gelassenheit*.

### ***Gelassenheit: Let the Notes Sound Forth***

*Gelassenheit* clears a 'neutral' space for good listening; it situates us in a space of silence that makes it easier to listen well and hear with accuracy; it enables us to hear what calls for hearing with a quieter, more global, and better-informed sense of the situation. (Levin, 1989, p. 228)

I offer a second vignette here to build upon the concept of *Gelassenheit*. Recently, my advisor and I were discussing *Gelassenheit*. He told this story. The student teachers in his practicum class had been discussing the activities they were planning

with their students in round one of student teaching. One fellow in the class was talking about teaching a unit on China to his grade six class. He had chosen to do a timeline of China as one of the activities for this unit. Then, my advisor asked him if a timeline was an activity that represented China well. This student was asked to think about the timeline in a different way. Was a timeline an activity that was a generous and suitable way to discuss this country located in the eastern hemisphere? Could the timeline limit the historical richness of China? And, conversely, could China speak to the understanding of timelines? Could the relationship between the two open up a space to understand both China and timelines differently?

Listening with *Gelassenheit* opens a space in which a richer understanding of China may occur. Is there a better way of handling this country as a topic in Social Studies? Does the topic or the material of study have anything to say in the way that it may be presented to the students? China's history is one which does not emphasize the linear quality of timelines and events as we do in North America. The non-linear time of China, as a topic, speaks to the pedagogue willing to listen and entertain that opening. The topic itself needs to be listened to with *Gelassenheit*.

The student teacher was embarrassed about choosing this activity after he allowed the space for just listening, *Gelassenheit*, to create the gap between the spokes of the wheel. Just the activity of creating the clearing was a sign of pedagogic openness which initiated a playful listening.

A space or gap is often opened by someone asking wise questions. Allowing for this question to address us requires an attitude of *Gelassenheit*. An interpretive pedagogy, which opens the door to thinking of things otherwise, encourages growth. There is a chance that openness may occur, rather than an unambiguous and univocal attitude which searches for the right answer. *Gelassenheit* lays a foundation for a better informed sense of situations in pedagogy.

### *Gelassenheit: In Search of Harmony Through the Question*

*Gelassenheit*, 'just listening', is often a *playful* listening, a listening which enjoys itself, a listening whose ultimate purpose is to be without a purpose. . . . 'Just listening' is a listening that wanders and drifts, . . . . When soundful beings are greeted by a joyful listening, a listening *opened* by joy, a listening playing freely in the presencing of that which sounds forth, the resonances which they set in motion can reverberate freely: freely within the openness we have given them. (Levin, 1989, p. 233-234)

My third vignette exemplifying *Gelassenheit* has an openness in which there is space to consider things and ask questions. These questions are often asked to us, as teachers, by our students. An example of this happened to me teaching a group of grade three girls. These students were enrolled in the Elementary Corrective Learning program in my school where they received corrective help with reading and/or writing.

During one lesson, I introduced the poem "The Old Coat". The poem is accompanied by a beautiful pencil sketch of an old coat hung in a porch.

The Old Coat  
by Siv Cedering

The old coat that hangs on the porch  
doesn't seem to think  
or dream,

but it goes along  
when grandpa walks to the barn  
to see that the horse is fed.

It covers grandma's apron  
when she goes outside  
to give the birds some bread.

It flaps its sleeves  
when mother runs to the coop  
to check if the hens have laid.

It buttons up tight in the storm  
to keep father warm  
when he puts the tools away in the shed.

And in the evening, before I go to bed,  
it stands with sleeves rolled up  
in the yard

looking for coat constellations  
or the flapping wings  
of some old coat bird.

(Cedering, 1997, p. 41)

We read this poem aloud. The grade three girls in my group put their pencils down. They stopped. What did this poem mean? It wasn't clear. One of the girls asked, "What does it mean when they say coat constellations? And, I don't get it when they say the coat is standing up in the yard? What is an old coat bird?"

They asked genuine questions and a lively and meaningful conversation followed which allowed these girls to play with the meaning of this poem. It was a discussion which held more value than merely asking comprehension questions. The girls took turns wondering, offering ideas and listening to each other. This listening, both to the poem and to each other, was something that I had been working toward with this particular group. Before this instance they had been having trouble learning to attend and listen.

During this conversation, a question asked by one of the girls was often answered by another girl in the group. It took time and slowness to allow this conversation to occur. I had other things planned for our usual routine of forty-five minutes, but I also had to stop and allow for playing around with the meaning of the poem.

In our discussion, I described the porch at my grandparents' old house and mentioned how the illustration accompanying the poem strongly reminded me of that porch. I told them of the old coat and coveralls that used to hang outside the back door in that porch too. I described the chicken coop at the back of my grandparents' huge farmyard.

Then we discussed the importance of the old coat. Everyone in the family wore the coat. We explored the farm jobs of each family member and how it cloaked each one of them during their daily responsibilities. At this point, we discovered the meaning in the last verse. The poet had discussed grandpa, grandma, mother and father who wore the coat. There was also a child who wanted to grow into this old coat. Then we acted out the little boy wearing the old coat, standing outside looking for coat constellations while flapping the long, long rolled up sleeves.

At the end of this lesson, we discussed how good readers need to ask questions if they don't understand what they read. We also discovered that some text takes hard work to understand and that it isn't just poor readers who have to work hard to understand text. They realized that it is important to keep searching for the owl when encountering challenging reading, and not to give up.

Then, I asked the girls what we had been doing during this activity. One of the girls answered: "together we realized what this poem is all about." Because of the playful listening and asking of questions, this was a lesson of note for these girls and for myself as a teacher too. This was a lesson which lives within the complexity and "hard fun" that Field & Jardine (1996) present as part of learning to read and write.

We often take on the responsibility of filling up every space for our students and not encouraging real questions. However, we need to ask questions which open possibilities, and we need to invite our



students to as well. As Gadamer points out "the essence of the *question* is to open up possibilities and keep them open" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 299). These girls, being playful with the reading of this poem, opened up possibilities by questioning.

It is in that playful space of questioning where a true search for understanding lives. "The path of all knowledge leads through the question. To ask a question means to bring into the open. The openness of what is in question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 363).

The voices of accountability, of the new Alberta language arts curriculum document, of the new math curriculum, of the new science curriculum and the changing culture outside the classroom door, threaten to make teaching more impotent with the demands of the every day practicalities of life. The "actual strain of existence" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 105) can become overwhelming. And, the *actual strain of existence* makes *Gelassenheit* seem impossible and impractical in our lives as pedagogues.

Living amidst this tension and difficulty is part of our present world of education. However, we need a place for just listening, a place where seeking open questions is valued. A space where, as educators, we may think deeply about what it is we are doing with the young in our care. A space for *Gelassenheit*. If we are able to do this for ourselves as educators, there is a greater chance that we will allow our students to open up possibilities in their learning. And, this clearing spaces can make a difference.

## Clearing Spaces

Space may sound like a vague, poetic metaphor until we realize that it describes experiences of everyday life. We know what it means to be in a crowded rush-hour bus. On the crowded bus we lack space to breathe and think and be ourselves. But in an open field, we open up too; ideas and feelings arise within us; our knowledge comes out of hiding. (Palmer, 1993, p. 70)

If we are to allow for *Gelassenheit* in our lives as pedagogues, we must allow the time and the openness needed to clear spaces and just listen. Heidegger introduces us to the idea of clearing a space. He offers the idea of *lichten*, a place with a clearing.

To clear (*lichten*) something means: to make something light, free and open; for example, to make a place in the woods free of trees. The open space that results is the clearing. (*Lichtung*). (May, 1996, p. 33)

May, in discussing Heidegger's concept of nothing, outlines the importance in his work of the *clearing* or *Lichtung*, "in conjunction with all the possible ways of understanding the German word *Lichtung* (one thinks, for example of the word *Waldblosse* {a gap in the forest through which light can enter})" (1996, p. 34). The light that enters may allow for the process of rediscovery, a process of discovery in the creative act (May, 1996, p. 88). A quiet place where light may enter. The clearing, the nothingness, may bring forth something, "by contrast with situations in the physical world under the law of causality - in consciousness something *can* arise out of nothing." (May, 1996, p. 87). And, there must sometimes be a space, a clearing for quiet and nothing in our lives as pedagogues. A

*nothing* which allows space for *Gelassenheit*. In this way we cultivate an appreciation of silence, of awe, and of openness to questioning.

Palmer (1993) offers us ways to clear space as pedagogues. Space may be left open in our physical world by changing the desks in the room into a circle. Space may be allowed in the discussion of concepts during lessons. Space may live in the silence that is valued in the classroom, a silence which invites all to speak. And space may live in allowing feelings in the classroom in an effort to connect in our pedagogical relationships. In this way, children may experience the importance of clearing spaces as well.

Clearing curricular spaces is a difficult and worthwhile endeavor. In a Calgary school, the children have been involved with various curricular tasks which are meant to open up space, tasks such as going to zoo school to study the question of keeping animals in cages, creating a museum at school after being involved in a museum project, protesting the construction of another shopping mall in a suburban area and a compilation of poems and stories which highlight the history of the national parks in our area.

Silence enables us to clear spaces. I end this chapter with a poem, "Silences - Tsankawi" by Nancy Wood in her collection of poems Spirit Walker and inspired by her work with Taos Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. This poem highlights the space that silence brings, an openness that welcomes *Gelassenheit*.

Silences - Tsankawi  
by Nancy Wood

Out there in the caves of remembrance  
on the mesa where sandstone footsteps  
wear a path of wonder in the mind,  
I heard my first silence.

It was merely  
a pinpoint of stillness, isolated  
from the desert wind and the sound  
of my own breathing.

In silence  
I heard the whisper of ancient people  
making robes and grinding corn  
as if it were  
A matter of life to them.  
In their muffled words  
I recognized the shadows of my own language,  
not even spoken by my children anymore.  
I heard these ancient people telling tales  
of visitors from the south,  
carrying parrots, and of the time  
they first saw  
the sun grow dark at noon.  
In this silence I learned much  
about the silence that nature gives  
to remind us  
of our nothingness.

(Wood, 1992, p. 58)

### CHAPTER THREE

#### SOMETHING FROM NOTHING: Listening to Pedagogical Relationships

In Western consciousness, the fundamental split between subject and object that began with Descartes produces a mode of acting which comes to be understood as a performance *on* life and others, rather than *with* life and with each other. Even our charity can take on the tone of condescension, because Cartesian consciousness is not self-reflective i.e. it does not, cannot ask, what *difference* it makes for me to know *you*. Yet experience tells us that any "meaningful" relationship implies that my life must become different as a result of knowing you, otherwise, we just go on living two solitudes. As the Trapist monk, Thomas Merton, once said: "If I give you my truth but do not receive your truth in return, there can be no truth between us."<sup>7</sup> Without true reciprocity, human relations are reduced to a power struggle, but the recovery of reciprocity implies a new way of being together whereby we put emphasis on our collective journey rather than on, say, the accumulation of knowledge *per se*. Reciprocity means ontology must take precedence over epistemology. (Smith, 1994, p. 92)

Something From Nothing is a children's book which invites an interpretive occasion, an occasion of clearing spaces which shows Grandfather living *with* his grandson, rather than performing life *on* the child. This interpretive occasion operates on two levels. First, it is a good book to read to children because of its quality and multi-layeredness. Second, it is full of pedagogical images and relationships.

Stopping to create a "neutral space for listening. . .situates us in a space of silence that makes it easier to listen well and hear with accuracy" (Levin, 1989, p. 228). Listening in this way has the

potential of opening up our understanding of how, as elementary school teachers, we live together with the young. This relationship *with* the young is a central issue in pedagogy mediated by the content we teach. And, that curricular content is an important place to base our pedagogical relationship. By exploring pedagogical images, we are invited to turn toward interpretation in pedagogy.

A turn toward interpretation means a drawing close to what we already are, to the way in which we *are* together; to an attention to what is really going on in our lives with children, rather than having that attention deflected away by disembodied knowledge, media hype, or the latest fad from some prominent educator with a loud voice. In pedagogical terms, a turn toward interpretation is interested in the way understanding is achieved between an adult and a child, with the deep question of what is required for them (us) to live together in a way that will ensure that life can go on. (Smith, 1994, p. 174)

A clearing of space for *Gelassenheit* is necessary for the development of understanding of what is required for young and old to live together well. Clearing a space through conversation, welcoming the young, finding our place in the relationship between the old and the young through the curricular material of the earth is necessary. By doing this, we are like Grandfather in the story, we begin to turn our material round and round (Gilman, 1992, p. 4) and open up a space for listening.

Listening well is a gift we give to others, and a gift others give to us. It is, as Smith says, a reciprocity. Older and wise colleagues, relatives and friends may teach us the importance of listening, of quiet places and of clearing spaces in pedagogical relationships.

A personal example of an older, more experienced pedagogue listening and guiding comes to mind. A language arts facilitator in our school district was a wise and caring pedagogue who introduced good books often. She introduced me to Something From Nothing. She was like Grandfather in this story, a wise and caring pedagogue, who was able to clear a space in her busy schedule to guide us, as teachers, toward good material. She invited us to listen, to stop and to create a space for quality literature.

A quiet place, a place of silence offers us space for listening where, in consciousness, something may arise out of nothing (May, 1996, p. 87). In contrast to a useless emptiness, this nothing welcomes silence and creates a space for listening which allows us to listen and hear "with a quieter, more global, and better-informed sense of the situation" (Levin, 1989, p. 228).

### A Retelling of Something From Nothing

The book Something From Nothing, is written by Phoebe Gilman, and adapted from a Jewish folktale. It is the story of Joseph and Grandfather. When Joseph is a baby, Grandfather makes a blanket for him. Joseph cherishes this blanket. Then the blanket begins to wear out. His mother insists that the blanket is old and worn, and is ready to be thrown out. Joseph is not ready to part with the blanket. He asks Grandfather, who is a tailor, to fix it.

Grandfather responds by carefully turning the blanket round and round. He decides to make the blanket into a jacket. And Joseph is thrilled.

When the jacket wears out Joseph asks for Grandfather's help again. Grandfather turns the material round and round again. A vest is made from the jacket. Joseph is pleased. After the vest wears out, Grandfather remakes the vest into a tie and then into a handkerchief.

Finally, when there is scarcely any material left, the handkerchief is made into a button. Joseph loses the button. His last connection with the blanket is gone. He is heartbroken. Joseph asks Grandfather to fix this situation. But, Joseph's mother tells him, "The button is gone, finished, kaput. Even your grandfather can't make something from nothing" (Gilman, 1992, p. 26).

Then Joseph realizes he has enough material for a wonderful story. He is now in school and able to preserve this experience in writing. Joseph carries on in school by writing about this favorite blanket in a manner which strongly resembles Grandfather's example; he *turns the material round and round* in order to write a wonderful story.

In addition to the textual story, another story is going on in the illustrations. Along with the beautiful images of Joseph and his family in their three level house, situated in a small town, there is a second story happening on the bottom of the page. Under the floorboards of the house there is a family of mice. As Grandfather



snips and snips, the mice under the floor are taking the material and using it to make what they need: clothing, curtains, blankets. The creations made by the mice are imitations of the household items of Joseph's extended family living in their multi-layered home.

### **Multi-layeredness**

Something From Nothing is a multi-layered folktale of people and mice. It portrays a vibrant and responsive relationship between Joseph and Grandfather. Grandfather represents the old, established world of tradition. Joseph represents the young, the new, the becoming.

In addition to the rich tale of Joseph and Grandfather, the illustrations in this book portray the multi-layered setting of the house in the story. In pedagogy there is also a multi-layeredness and complexity which is often overlooked in the demanding day to day business of teaching. This complexity exists in living in the midst of children, and knowledge regarding the theory of pedagogy. To live amidst well requires moral knowledge and experience. Gadamer uses the term *phronesis* (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 189). *Phronesis* requires an understanding of that which we stand amidst. An awareness of the richness, the multi-layeredness, the complexity and the difficulty of teaching may lead to a different and deeper understanding of the daily activities of the classroom. *Phronesis* requires a sense of judgement which we use to examine these layers of complexity existing in classrooms.

### **Judgement and Phronesis**

The complexity of our classrooms can be overwhelming. Understanding ourselves, our children and our culture helps us to live in the midst of this busyness with integrity and phronesis. Judgement aids us in knowing what is important enough to demand our attention. One way of living well in the complexity of teaching young children is by developing a sense of judgement which guides decisions made in the pedagogical relationships borne from children and curriculum. Weinsheimer writes about Gadamer's concept of judgement:

Whenever judgement is necessary, whenever there is no rule for the application of rules, what a rule means (its interpretation) will be indivisible from, and in part determined by, the instances to which it is applied. Moral knowledge, like legal, requires judgement: the skill (for which there is no rule) to apply rules. Judgement is needed because there is always a tension between the general rule and the particular instance; and thus, though it is always necessary, it is never sufficient to know the general rule. For not only is the general applied to the particular in the act of judgement, but also the particular is applied to the general. They supplement and complement each other reciprocally. Such judgement is not impulsive but deliberate. It cannot merely subsume the particular under the general, and thus it requires a weighing of both. It requires reflecting and deliberating with oneself. This is phronesis, the virtue of reflective deliberation that determines right application. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 191)

Daily decisions regarding teaching are based upon this sense of judgement. Phronesis is the skill to develop *right application*.

Phronesis requires understanding. And, understanding in the human sciences requires application. Application is a way of understanding a tradition and carrying it on: "without application there is no understanding" (Weinsheimer, 1985 p. 195). Phronesis requires sound judgement.

As teachers, we daily attempt to live phronesis, or *right application*. Decisions are made to select good materials to present to the children. In determining a good book to share with children this sense of judgement is necessary.

Common sense is exhibited primarily in making judgements about right and wrong, proper and improper. Whoever has a sound judgement is not thereby enabled to judge particulars under universal viewpoints, but he knows what is really important--i.e., he sees things from right and sound points of view. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 32)

A sound judgement of *right application* requires time to acquire. It requires a careful interpretation of experience. It includes knowledge gained through discussions with colleagues, like my language arts facilitator. This sense of judgement grows by working with children and carefully watching their response in relation to good literature or well presented curriculum. Grandfather is an example of a careful pedagogue who operates with phronesis and good judgement by using his life experiences and then listening to carefully act upon Joseph's requests to fix the blanket.

This sense of judgement creates space for studying good books in a manner which allows us to live with them. We are encouraged to share the truths in literature rather than being consumers of

literature. For example, a consumptive attitude to literature employs it mainly to teach specific bits of knowledge such as who is the main character and what is the setting.

Pedagogically, good conversations in classrooms are enticed by using quality literature. We are enticed to stop and dwell in the literature together. Quality literature invites teacher and children to return to it again and again; it is multi-layered which allows space for working out understanding in conversations between old and young.

If we savor literature as invitation, reading together in classrooms may take on a different tone. But, before this invitation is accepted, an attitude of *Gelassenheit* is needed to allow for these conversations which open up space for the back and forth discussion. In this way understanding is more a mediation than a reconstruction (Gadamer, 1977, p. xvi), a working out of ideas together.

### Dwelling Within a Conversation

In Africa, in the Philippines and even here in Korea it is quite striking how the young are precisely *not* marginalized in the way so observable in the West. In countries that have not had the long legacy of industrial and capital development one still finds young and old interacting together with mutual respect and natural affection. I fear it is precisely these qualities that may be so easily lost in the blind race for economic and social development. (Smith, 1994, p. 161)

I begin this section with a story that was told to me by a fellow teacher. He said that one day he was walking down the hallway in

his school. He heard the voices of the teachers in their classrooms wafting out into the corridor. He was struck by the hollow sound of some of the voices. It was as if they were speaking to hear themselves.

My friend compared these voices to the voice tone of the gym teacher, when giving directions or doing drills, an attempt to shout above the surrounding noise, getting louder all the time, but is usually lost in the echo and noise of the gym activity. As a teacher, he said, he would rather retire from teaching than speak in a tone of voice which neither engages nor expects a response. This, he emphasized, is not the voice of a teacher who is ready to be engaged in a curricular conversation motivated by the mutual respect and natural affection of his students.

To conduct a conversation, as stated by Gadamer, is to allow space for a back and forth movement which takes on a character of testing.

To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the subject matter to which the partners in the dialogue are oriented. It requires that one does not try to argue the other person down but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of testing. (1994, p. 367)

This kind of conversation is one which encourages a clearing and an empty space around which we may consider each other's opinions. By conversing together over books, we may begin to experience a pedagogy of reading, to children, in a way which invites us to dwell together in the literature.

Dwelling is not primarily inhabiting but taking care of and creating that space within which something comes into its own and flourishes. Dwelling is primarily saving, in the older sense of setting something free to become itself, what it essentially is. . . .Dwelling is that which cares for things so that they essentially presence and come into their own. (cited in Sessions & Devall, 1985, p. 98-9) (cited in Jardine, 1992, p. 30)

This dwelling is encouraged by listening, stopping and creating a space. An open conversation allows the things discussed to present themselves and come into their own. Such an open conversation may foster a pedagogy which values openings and invites quiet places.

An open conversation is always about something. It has content and possibilities. The content may be compared to the material of the blanket in Something From Nothing. The material begins in one form, and when carefully unfolded and turned round and round, it welcomes new possibilities. The content changes form as understanding is cultivated by welcoming the young into the conversation. Yet, this content, this material, has its own possibilities and limits and its own discipline. The discipline guides and limits the possibilities. At the same time the material is enhanced when it is a welcome part of the relationship between the old and the young.

By welcoming the young, teachers lay the foundation for welcoming the material. When teachers welcome the young, the young also welcome the old. Conversations may become open to the possibilities which come of welcoming the young into the world. To repeat the words of Thomas Merton, quoted in Smith, "If I give you my truth but do not receive your truth in return, there can be no

truth between us." (Smith, 1994, p. 92). And, without truth between us we do not welcome each other.

### Welcoming

I keep thinking of those icons of Buddha which show him surrounded by children, or Zen scholar Toyoji Togo's words about the rustic saint Ryokan-osho, "Day after day he spends playing with children. . . .";<sup>17</sup> or the words of Jesus, "Let the children come to me. Do not stop them. Unless you become like a child you cannot see the kingdom";<sup>18</sup> or Pierre Erny's wonderful study of the child in Africa and the child's special status as "one who brings a message from beyond."<sup>19</sup> Modernity is not friendly to children because what is vulnerable, weak, or not fully understood is seen as a problem to be dealt with. Yet ancient wisdom points us back to the child as one who reminds us of our own deep vulnerability and our need for a more gentle way of being together on this earth. I hope education can eventually find the means by which to call a hardened world to its fuller senses. (Smith, 1994, p. 162)

At the beginning of the book, Something From Nothing, Grandfather articulates welcome by making Joseph "a wonderful blanket. . .to keep him warm and cozy and to chase away bad dreams" (Gilman, 1992, p. 1-2). Grandfather gently welcomes Joseph. He acknowledges the status of his grandson and acts with wisdom and sensitivity to his presence. He validates the importance of the relationship between Joseph and himself. The relationship between Joseph and Grandfather is a strongly pedagogic one. Grandfather shows his care for Joseph by making him the blanket. He establishes a place for Joseph, a blanket to wrap and protect him in.

Grandfather's gesture welcomes Joseph into Grandfather's tradition within the world. This gesture articulates a message: You have roots. You are connected. You are born into this time, place, family. We welcome you. We welcome you into this world in which you are born.

As teachers, in September every year, we also welcome the young. Welcoming is an important part of the pedagogic process. Welcoming is the beginning of the pedagogic relationship between the old and the young, this teacher with these children and this curricular material. The teacher makes a place for the children by doing things such as preparing the classroom environment, putting up bulletin boards, making name tags and by preparing herself to welcome the students.

Teachers often feel it is necessary to establish strict control in the form of rules and routines. This can be compared to Joseph's blanket. When he is little, it is appropriate to bundle him in it. As he grows older, he needs to be let out of the blanket. It becomes a cover. Over time, as the blanket recedes, Joseph's inner discipline and maturity develops. Grandfather, through careful action, phronesis, with the blanket, leads Joseph to right action.

Rules, if too confining, take on the character of smothering the young. They may become inappropriately controlling if they are not allowed to open up along with the growth of the child, as Grandfather opens up the blanket and changes its form for an older Joseph.



Welcoming also includes the teaching of the values and obligations of the classroom community in preparation for being good stewards of the earth. Rules and responsibilities are outlined so that old and young can find their place in this community together.

Rules and routines may be thought of as ways of being responsible to each other and may commence a conversation between teacher and children. A classroom environment which sustains coming to an understanding together, like the girls in Chapter Two who studied the poem "The Old Coat", may be built. An understanding which searches for depth and relevance in our lives together as old and young is worth the time.

For example, from the beginning of my teaching career the importance of establishing rules, routines and control in September has been impressed upon me by older, experienced colleagues. As I gain experience, I understand this process differently. At the beginning of the school year I use books, like Something From Nothing, to build a climate of mutual respect for each other, the curriculum and our being together in the classroom and in the school.

Effie, a story by Barbara Reid, is another book that is useful in welcoming the children. Effie is an ant who lives in the jungle. She is an ant who always speaks in a loud voice; consequently, none of the other animals want to be with Effie. They all avoid her. Effie is sad about spending her time alone. Then, one day Effie averts disaster for herself and her colony of ants by shouting in her loud voice to an elephant. The elephant hears Effie's voice and does not

step on any of the ants in the ant colony. Effie finds an appropriate place for this loud voice. She also gains the friendship of the elephants and the respect of her fellow ants in the ant colony.

Apart from being an enjoyable book (the children love chiming in and shouting Effie's voice with me), this book invites consideration of how we should live together. We explore appropriate voices to use when we are conversing in the classroom.

By welcoming children with literature like Something From Nothing and Effie, the interrelationships in the classroom are specifically discussed so that the pedagogical relationship between teacher and children may be reciprocal. In this way, the teacher's actions can serve the interests of the children guided by phronesis. Not just anything goes. Something is made from something in terms of the cultural expectations of the world. The classroom is a place not totally teacher directed or child centered, but a space in which old and young create a significant curriculum.

Welcome also entails building a significant curriculum by believing that children "could consider things of consequence and were interested in the world around them. Unlike approaches to curriculum where everything was kind of dumped into a theme, the disciplines were lost, the discreteness, the beauty of the disciplines was lost. . . .and that we disneyize the world of children" (A quote from a school administrator during an interview). In this realm of

welcoming, it is in the presentation of significant issues and opportunities for children that welcomes them into a genuine conversation.

Welcome entails a genuine conversation between the young and the old. As Gadamer says, "in a genuine conversation, something occurs to both partners that had not occurred to either of them before. When they come to an understanding, something new is conceived. Something new happens" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 251). Something new may happen if both parties in the conversation are able to stop and cultivate silence by listening.

### Stopping to Listen for a Genuine Encounter

But the cultivating of silence ultimately requires a calm, relaxed, well-balanced state, body and mind. The more this state is achieved, the easier it becomes to *neutralize* the polarizing intentionalities of desire, the vectors of attraction and aversion which bind our everyday hearing to the ego-logically constituted structure of subject and object . . . .Neutralization makes way for a major *Gestalt* shift: a shift to a gentler, looser, more diffused mode of listening (Levin, 1989, p. 233)

In neutralizing some of our conceptions of pedagogy, listening to statements, like the following one, may create a sense of discord because of our tradition of planning out lessons and units in advance. "Much of what constitutes good teaching simply cannot be known in advance of a genuine encounter with children" (Smith, 1994, p. 64). This observation causes us to stop and listen. The calm, balanced state required by *Gelassenheit* may make the difference between

teaching for genuine encounters with children, or teaching to replicate knowledge in a one way exchange.

The point is that education, including teacher education, is severely poverty-stricken if its momentum is only one-way, that is, projecting onto a self-defined externalized world of, say, children, or student teachers, a litany of plans and intentions, without an embracing of that agenda within a project of self-healing on our part as teachers. Teachers must understand the way in which their work, insofar as it operates unreflectively in the manner of which we have been speaking, is heavily implicated in the rationalist distortions of pure technique. . . .a willingness to take up the hard work of attending to the tain of one's own mirror. (Smith, 1994, p. 82)

To stop over Something From Nothing, is an opportunity to create a space for listening, as Grandfather does for Joseph. It enables us to take up the hard work of attending to the *tain of our own mirror*. Grandfather, like teachers today, must listen so that he can respond. The communication between Grandfather and Joseph is not the one way communication that David Smith presents in the above quotation. Grandfather is an elder who creates a space for listening by stopping to help Joseph. Grandfather embodies pedagogic wisdom (van Manen, 1982). He responds true to his talents as a tailor, and within the limits of the situation. Grandfather responds realistically to Joseph, harmonious with his grandson's request. In material terms, he does not make something from nothing. Grandfather makes something from something.

By stopping, Grandfather demonstrates van Manen's "pedagogic praxis" (1982, p. 47) which is "relations and situations of

thoughtfully 'leading' the child into the world, by mediating tactfully between the original self-activity, the deep interests of the child, and the spiritual, cultural meanings and objectifications of the world" (van Manen, 1982, p. 47). Grandfather's actions help Joseph find his place in the world.

The old support the young by "tactfully" (van Manen, 1982, p. 47) heeding requests in particular situations. Grandfather cannot do anything, he must *tactfully* do what is necessary in this situation. A pedagogical relationship is fostered by stopping and allowing the to and fro conversation to mediate a genuine encounter.

Joseph, guided by Grandfather, is now ready to make the loss of his blanket into something which creates learning as he carries on to write his story. Joseph does this by stopping, just as grandfather does. He stops to reflect upon the situation. He asks himself how he might carry on.

By stopping, we may create a space in which we can listen and reaffirm the pedagogical relationship between the young and the old. It may be a quiet place from which to proceed.

### Pedagogic Relationships: Finding a Place

Whispering in this paradox of solitariness/exquisiteness and interrelation is a sense of having a place which is not of my own making: it is granted a place, freely given, and mindfulness of this gift is, in a deep sense, a finding (Heidegger, 1968). (cited in Jardine, 1992, p. 26)

Grandfather begins a pedagogic relationship with Joseph. "Pedagogy constitutes our relationship with children," says Beck (1993, p. 5). In the pedagogic relationship lies possibility for transformation and learning as the old and the young meet, find their places and move forward. "We inherit traditions and language: we are subject to them, but as such we have a personal and collective say in where they will go" (Beck, 1993, p. 8). The way we allow for the transformation of tradition and language, or not, will influence the transformative possibilities in the relationship between old and young and the curricular content.

Grandfather sees his lifework of raising his grandson in a way reverent of the past. By renewing the blanket for Joseph, Grandfather acknowledges the difference that Joseph makes in his own life. The birth of Joseph is seen by Grandfather as a "fecund instance" (Jardine, 1994a).

This relation between the fecund instance and the already established is at the heart of hermeneutics. In such a conception, tradition and age are essential to understanding but the fecund instance is essential to tradition. This instance is not simple additive but transformative of tradition. That is to say, the relation between the instance and tradition is interpretive, not a matter of simple. . . addition. (Jardine, 1994a, p. 520)

The relationship between the old and the young is often taken for granted in schooling. The interdependency of the old and the young establishes a relationship instead of the subject and object dichotomy presented by David Smith earlier in this chapter. The

reciprocity of this relationship allows for the mediation of culture and language in a "fecund" (Jardine, 1994a) manner.

Grandfather understands that Joseph's birth will transform his life in ways which he cannot yet know. Joseph makes him a Grandfather. In his role as a grandfather, he knows that his life will be transformed. Just as a teacher knows that this group of children will make a difference in her life and she in theirs.

Joseph is granted a place by Grandfather. In the pedagogic relationship between Joseph and Grandfather, Joseph learns his place. He feels connected through the caring attention of Grandfather. "Grandpa can fix it," is a phrase that Joseph repeats with confidence. This phrase shows that Joseph knows he is not left alone to fend for himself. He knows that he has the guidance of Grandfather to help him through the loss of his blanket. Joseph knows his place in this relationship, as does Grandfather. Together they have mediated a "finding" (Heidegger cited in Jardine, 1992).

The relationship between Joseph and Grandfather is one which allows for space. There is an openness between them. Yet, there also exists a tension. As the relationship carries on over time, Joseph makes demands on Grandfather. And, Grandfather will, in turn, make demands on Joseph. A tension exists. Grandfather is asked to return to the remaking of the blanket:

to preserve the world against the mortality of its creators and its habitants, it must be constantly set right anew. The problem is simply to educate in such a way that setting-right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured.<sup>11</sup> (Arendt, cited in Jardine, 1990, p. 110)

And, *constantly setting right anew* involves a collective decision between the old and young mediated through the curricular material of *this precious Earth*.

### The Material of This Precious Earth

Knowing the Earth  
by Nancy Wood

To know the Earth on a first-name basis  
You must know the meaning of river stones first.  
Find a place that calls to you and there  
Lie face down in the grass until you feel  
Each plant alive with the mystery of beginnings.  
Move in a circle until you discover an insect  
Crawling with knowledge in its heart.  
Examine a newborn leaf and find a map of a universe  
So vast that only Eagles understand.  
Observe the journey of an ant and imitate its path  
Of persistence in a world of bigger things.  
Borrow a cloud and drift high above the Earth,  
Looking down at the smallness of your life.  
The journey begins on a path made of your old mistakes.  
The journey continues when you call the Earth by name.  
(Wood, 1993, p. 35)

In a local school, the professional development was guided by questions which ask: "how we would want to work with young people with all kinds of ideas about the world and their place in it. . . .What could constitute a significant curriculum?" (A quote from



an interview with a school administrator). A significant curriculum heralds from the earth. The earth is the basis for curricular learning, for education. It is represented, in the book, by Joseph's blanket. "Knowing the Earth by name" is more than a knowledge of the content to be taught in the curriculum guide. It is the place where young and old come together to mediate the discovery of the earth's wonder and the connectedness of the life of animate and inanimate creatures in our earthly web (Smith, 1994). The material of the earth is where the pedagogic relationship unfolds.

Phoebe Gilman, the author of Something From Nothing, highlights the importance of the material of the earth by placing the blanket on the cover of the book. The cover shows Joseph and Grandfather facing and holding the blanket. The blanket, which may represent the material for learning, is there as a connection between the old and the young.

Grandfather's talent and craftsmanship as a tailor become evident in the story. He is limited by the material, his expertise in his craft and the tools he has at the time. Grandfather examines the material carefully; then he uses what he has to make something of consequence for Joseph. Grandfather uses his wisdom and experience to transform the blanket.

Pedagogically speaking, Grandfather does as careful pedagogues do. He looks to the material itself for a sense of how to best treat it, and asks himself how to let it unfold. Treating the material well by carefully unfolding it means knowing the earth and

learning to live with, and learning to take educational advantage of, the discipline and organization originating from things themselves and originating from children's spontaneous interest in the world, their *inter esse*, their being in the middle of things. Once children's 'interests' are understood as having a certain inviolable integrity, and once the teacher has savored and explored the contours and textures of what is being taught (i.e., once the teacher deeply understands the material), taking educational advantage of such interests by drawing children into these contours and textures will help prevent the discipline problems that come from misunderstanding children and not deeply understanding the material. The teacher, in such an instance, becomes a facilitator, a provocateur, and, one hopes, a joyous example of a loving interest in children and in the contours and textures of the Earth. (Jardine, 1990, p. 116)

The material is presented artfully when a teacher understands it well. When material is well tailored, the children know that the learning is relevant in their lives. There is often a change in the children when this happens. Relevant material, which results from knowing the earth well, has a certain sense of harmony. The old and the young may come together in a way that transforms all participants. The children become calm, focused and begin to learn a sense of discipline which comes from the material of the earth. The children put their pencils down and create an opening for listening. They become, as Heidegger describes, attuned, as having the character of being affected or moved (1996, p. 129).

Attunement entails a commitment to learning which is inspired. The word inspiration is derived from the Latin word *spiritus* which means breath (Ayto, 1990, p. 494). Inspiration denotes the breath of life, animation and possibility. Attunement

and inspiration to curricular material creates spaces for children and teachers to work in.

Curricular spaces open possibilities and offer a broader understanding of education. This quote from a school administrator attests to this openness:

we [the teachers] knew that education could be enriched by opportunities to be out in the community and the children should be out in the community. That they should have a sense that education is simply not within the five hours. It's a much, much broader experience. . . .The kids opened their own museum here for instance. They had over one thousand artifacts that they needed to organize in a way that the museum did. And they talked about how did they want traffic to flow through the space, for instance, and how would this team organize their things. And then they worked toward an actual opening of a museum just like the staff does down at the Glenbow. . . .it was such a powerful experience for them that it will provoke thinking, I would guess, as long as they're able to visit museums.

This museum project is an example of creating significant curricular spaces for teachers and children to work within.

I conclude this chapter with a poem about the relationship between generations.

## Generations

by Nancy Wood

In the days when there were no days  
And the nights were not counted yet  
There were these Generations:

The Grandfather, who created us,  
Drew his breath from the Sun's energy  
Then placed his lips upon the seed  
Of Birds, of Animals, of Men.

The Grandmother issued stars and moon  
From her breast of sacred light,  
Offered the mystery of sky  
And the healing robe of night.

The Father, who is the Living Sun,  
Scattered darkness before him,  
Then announced the growth of root and bone  
With the coming of each dawn.

The Mother became the Enduring Earth.  
Naming Wind and Fire and Water,  
She gave life to Generations  
And harmony to stones.

The Children passed from hands of parents,  
Gathered up root and bone,  
Embraced the world with laughter

Then showed the Grandfather in.  
(Wood, 1993, p. 45)

As educators, we must also show the child in. Grandfather's example guides us. In the past, we have had difficulty finding our place and the place of children in schooling and in society.

The old unilateral options of *gericentrism* (appealing to the authority of age, convention, tradition, nostalgia) and *pedocentrism* (child-centered pedagogy) only produce monstrous states of siege which are irresponsible to the matters at hand, that is to the question of how life is mediated through relations between old and young. (Smith, 1994, p. 195)

In welcoming children, allowing for conversations which respect each others' truths and learning to explore the *contours and textures* of the curricular mandates, we move toward understanding ourselves and our children by living within the discipline of the material we present, like the teachers and children have done in the museum project. Proceeding like Grandfather may offer us hope, rejuvenation and the quiet places needed for regaining the strength to move into the future together in a gentler way by listening to each other openly.

because our future is morally linked to the question of how we respond to new life in our midst here and now. We need to inquire critically and profoundly into all forms of thinking in our profession which take us away from our distinctly privileged mandate. (Smith, 1994, p. 196)

## CHAPTER INTERLUDE

### A SPACE BETWEEN THE CHAPTERS: Listening to the *Everydayness of Being*

When I asked one of the children in my reading group why grandpa keeps fixing the blanket he said: "I think that Grandpa keeps fixing the blanket because it's a special thing to the boy."

David Smith advises us, that as critical pedagogues, we need to critically and profoundly inquire into all forms of thinking in our profession which involves responding to the new life in our midst (Smith, 1994, p. 196). In this chapter interlude, I inquire into a thread that was left to lie fallow in the last chapter. This thread is one of rupture and significance. It is the stance of Mother, in the story Something From Nothing, who creates a space for the authentic understanding of "everydayness" (Heidegger, 1996). Mother is presented in the telling of the folktale; however, she is only a shadow. Mother lives in the immediacy of everyday life with her children and her parents. It is not Mother who is able to mediate thoughtfully between the child and the world. It is Grandfather. Mother is distracted, in a hurry, caught up in the immediacy of the everyday responsibilities of serving her family. She operates on a practical mode which gets things done in an everyday kind of existence, in a similar manner of elementary teachers of today.

In this chapter, the numerous gender and political issues which arise from the interpretation of Mother are not dealt with. It is noted that the issues of Mother, elementary teaching and lack of

possibility which arise have value and credence and may be addressed in future work.

### **Everydayness**

Mother, in Gilman's story, does not take up the significance of Joseph's blanket. She is caught up in the world of "everydayness" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 156). Mother maintains the everydayness necessary for Grandfather, Joseph and the rest of the family. The practicalities of everyday must be tended to or the family would not be able to carry on. Grandfather and Joseph benefit from her tending. Mother is the primary tender of everyday practicalities, much like classroom teachers.

Heidegger (1996, p. 156) offers insight into interpreting everyday life. He does this to help us understand taken for granted aspects of living which are so deftly a part of everyday life that we must work toward understanding their significance. Heidegger, in presenting the everydayness of beings, discusses four main phenomena. These four phenomena are idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity, and falling prey and thrownness.

#### **Idle talk**

The first phenomenon is idle talk, a talk which lacks grounding. It is talking and listening which does not ask open questions. In idle talk, "hearing and understanding have attached themselves beforehand to what is spoken about as such" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 157). And, idle talk is apparently open in the sense of having

understanding for everything without any previous appropriation of the matter (Heidegger, 1996, p. 158). Heidegger tells us that idle talk is shallow, and does not attempt to reach a genuine understanding.

Idle talk appears to be open:

but, at the same time, idle talk is closed in the sense that, by its very nature, idle talk is a closing off since it *omits* going back to the foundation of what is being talked about.

This closing off is aggravated anew by the fact that idle talk, in which an understanding of what is being talked about is supposedly reached, holds any new questioning and discussion at a distance because it presumes it has understood and in a peculiar way it suppresses them and holds them back.

(Heidegger, 1996, p. 158)

Heidegger presents idle talk as groundless because it does not go back to the foundation of what is being talked about. It is an uprooted understanding with a shallow foundation. And, the state of groundlessness is concealed from us, as beings, in this condition.

For example, Mother does not take up the significance of the blanket. She exclaims several times throughout the book that the blanket is worn out and should be thrown away. Mother exclaims, "Joseph, look at your blanket. It's frazzled, it's worn, it's unsightly, it's torn. It is time to throw it out" (Gilman, 1992, p. 3). Mother does not stop to see the possibilities that the blanket may have in the midst of her everydayness. She sees the blanket as old and tattered. And, Joseph may keep it, or he may throw it out. Her involvement in her domestic situation takes up most of her time and energy.

Therefore, she does not take up Joseph's request to salvage his blanket.



When I asked one of the children in my reading group why Grandpa keeps fixing the blanket he said, "I think that Grandpa keeps on fixing it because it's a special thing to the boy." Mother realizes this, but is unable to entertain the possibilities that Grandfather brings forward. She does not understand this situation deeply and because of this cannot offer other possibilities.

Idle talk is a phenomenon in elementary teaching. Often, as teachers, we assume that we understand the teaching methods that we use, and make decisions based upon these assumptions. We need to go back and listen for the grounding of the theories in which the method lives. Like Mother, we often do not entertain possibilities in curricular learning because of our entrenchment in everydayness. Idle talk is easier and gets jobs done quicker.

### Curiosity

"If you don't want to throw away something, you can make something better." (A quote from one of my students when discussing the story Something From Nothing).

Staying with something and making something better is not understood by Mother. She displays what Heidegger terms as curiosity. Curiosity is presented as a way of seeing which does not see to understand but to see something new. Curiosity is throwing out old things to make something new which is seen as better simply because it is new. It is a seeing that seeks novelty and is characterized, by Heidegger, as not staying with what is nearest.

Hence, by not staying, the second element of curiosity, as

distraction, is evident. A person knows just to have known. There exists a constant search for the stimulation of new information. In searching there is a small stop in the finding, but it is short-lived. A search begins anew for the next challenge.

This perpetual searching leads to Heidegger's third essential character of curiosity, as never dwelling anywhere. Thus curiosity is "everywhere and nowhere" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 161). Curiosity uproots beings and is accompanied by idle talk. "Curiosity, for which nothing is closed off, and idle talk, for which there is nothing that is not understood" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 162) is part of everydayness. Curiosity, for which everything is possible, and idle talk which assumes having understood everything, become the mode of being.

Never dwelling anywhere might mean that Grandpa is constantly throwing out the old blanket and making a new one for Joseph. And as one of the students in my reading group stated, "if he just threw it out there's not much of a story to tell about." In searching for the new, we as teachers, lose the value of staying with stories which take time to read and understand. Distraction and the inability to dwell do not allow for extended conversation between students and teachers.

This phenomenon of curiosity constantly searches for new methods. It is curiosity, like the Mother's, which wants to change. This change is equated with progress and is generally considered desirable. Staying with something may mean slowing down. Slowing down is seen as too slow. And, all too often, it is felt that if things do

not keep changing, they will stagnate.

### **Ambiguity**

Ambiguity is presented as the third phenomenon of everydayness. Anyone can say anything about everything in the everyday world of living and we no longer can decide what is truly understood and what is not (Heidegger, 1996, p. 162). This creates an ambiguous situation in which to dwell.

the loudest idle talk and the most inventive curiosity keep the "business" going, where everything happens in an everyday way, and basically nothing happens at all. (Heidegger, 1996, p.163)

Mother, again, is a model of ambiguity. She feels that the blanket should be thrown out. She does enter into a conversation with Joseph, but is ready to carry on without the blanket. She is ready to keep the business of the family going in its essential everyday way. She acts as if she understands what the situation calls for, but she seems ambiguously unaware of the fact that there is something else that can be done with the blanket. Realizing the importance of this situation does not occur to her until after it is over, even though she is a part of the situation all along in her everydayness.

Mother does honor the slowness needed to make something new from the old. She keeps the business going. She is ready to throw out the old as garbage and bring in the new as desirable. As one of the girls in my reading group said after being asked the question about why mother wants to throw things out: "Because it's

[the blanket] getting old and Joseph's growing up to be older and he doesn't need the blanket anymore." And one of the boys added, "because its [the blanket] got lots of holes in it and its not good to use." Mother, in her everydayness, does not validate the significance of the old blanket to Joseph. She opts to throw it out and get something new.

This throwing out of the old as refuse and bringing in the new as desirable is an everyday trait in curricular theorizing. In specific examples over time this has been the case. Whole language theorizing, in its worst interpretation, is one very recent example of this lionizing of the new. Many of us thought it was no longer permissible to teach skills; these were seen as taboo and too traditional to present to children. In this ambiguous situation, we, like Mother, had fallen prey to the world and to being-in-the-world.

### **Falling prey and thrownness**

Heidegger's fourth phenomenon of everydayness is falling prey and thrownness. He points out that the conditions of idle talk, curiosity, ambiguity and falling prey and thrownness are not negative terms. Heidegger tells us that "being-in [the world] is quite different from a confrontation which merely observes and acts, that is, the concurrent objective presence of a subject and an object" (1996, p. 165). They are conditions of being in the world, and being a part of it.

"Falling prey to the 'world' means being absorbed in being-with-one-another as it is guided by idle talk, curiosity and

ambiguity" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 164). It means being involved in the day to day activities of living. In the midst of the day to day activities, it is natural to take for granted the public interpretation of everyday phenomenon. By doing this Heidegger tells us that we become tranquilized (Heidegger, 1996, p. 166). Falling prey is tranquilizing.

it gets spread abroad increasingly that there is no need of authentic, attuned understanding. . . .that one is leading and sustaining a full and genuine 'life' brings a *tranquilization* to Da-sein, for which everything is in the "best order" and for whom all doors are open. . . .This tranquilization in inauthentic being, however, does not seduce one into stagnation and inactivity, but drives one to uninhibited 'busyness.'  
(Heidegger, 1996, p. 166)

Like Mother, we become busy as we are thrown into the tranquilizing of understanding. We become thrown, and this thrownness shows itself in being concerned about being. In attunement and discourse (Heidegger, 1996), we turn toward understanding authentic existence: "authentic existence is nothing which hovers over entangled everydayness, but is existentially only a modified grasp of everydayness" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 167). When this happens we may begin to try to reach for the foundation of things and hear with different ears. It is in the understanding of *authentic existence* that *Gelassenheit* may come forth. It is in understanding authentic existence that quiet places may be situated. *Gelassenheit* prepares us for attentive listening.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CREATING BLOOM THROUGH ATTENTIVE LISTENING

#### Creating Bloom

What have farmers done when they have mechanized and computerized their farms? They have removed themselves and their pleasure from their work.

I was fortunate, late in life to know Henry Besuden of Clark County, Kentucky, the premier Southdown sheep breeder and one of the great farmers of his time. He told me once that his first morning duty in the spring and early summer was to saddle his horse and ride across his pastures to see the condition of the grass when it was freshest from the moisture and coolness of the night. What he wanted to see in his pastures at that time of year, when his spring lambs would be fattening, was what he called 'bloom' --- by which he meant, not flowers, but a certain visibility of delectability. He recognized it, of course, by his delight in it. He was one of the best of the traditional livestockmen --- the husbender or husband of his animals. As such, he was not interested in 'statistical indicators' of his flock's 'productivity'; he wanted his sheep to be pleased. If they were pleased with their pasture, they would eat eagerly, drink well, rest and grow. He knew their pleasure by his own. (Berry, 1987, p. 21)

This quote is taken from a sermon given by Wendell Berry in New York's City Cathedral of St. John the Divine on November 8, 1987. The title is "The Profit in Work's Pleasure". I have included it to highlight creating bloom in classrooms. Bloom is a disciplined balance between the teacher, the children and the curriculum. For example, in Gilman's book, Grandfather created bloom through his

attentive listening and sensitive treatment of the material at Joseph's request.

Heidegger suggests living authentically as an important way to understand and proceed in the everydayness of being. Bloom may create a classroom community in which learning well and living authentically may be cultivated through a deep understanding of the particular situation.

Creating bloom is difficult to talk about with colleagues. The idea of allowing pleasure to be a way of proceeding in teaching is foreign to many of us as educators. We often get caught in the snarl of subjective and objective conflict in our teaching. We often become too objective or too subjective in our practice:

Objectivism tells the world what it is rather than listening to what it says about itself. Subjectivism is the decision to listen to no one except ourselves. But truth requires listening in obedience to each other, responding to what we hear, acknowledging and recreating the bonds of the community of truth. (Palmer, 1993, p. 67)

Palmer (1993) tells us to submit ourselves to something larger than ourselves. By listening obediently, we may better understand our situation.

At its root, the word "obedience" means not only "to listen" but "to listen from below". How fascinating that this is also the commonsense meaning of the word "understand," which suggests that we know something by "standing under" it. Both obedience and understanding imply submitting ourselves to something larger than any one of us, something on which we all depend. Both imply subjecting ourselves to the communal bond of truth. (Palmer, 1993, p. 67)

Creating bloom in the classroom should not be done in a subjective, romanticized way honoring only the wishes of the children or the teacher. Nor should it be created in a way which only seeks to allow the teacher to choose whatever materials he or she chooses without regard to good practice. It is in submitting to understanding this intricate relationship between the particular situation of this pasture, this grass, these sheep and this herder that a sense of harmony emerges to produce a *visibility of delectability*. It is in listening attentively and obediently that bloom may be created.

Henry Besuden of Clark County was a particular herder. He was concerned with his particular kind of sheep in their particular pasture. He understood these sheep, his pasture and what ingredients need to be present to herald forth this sense of harmony and pleasure. Just as Henry Besuden did not remove himself from this pasture and these sheep, there is no need for the teacher to remove his or her pleasure from the task of teaching these particular children in this particular classroom.

Henry Besuden was attending or attentive to his sheep. He epitomizes the etymology of the word attend. The word attentive is derived from the word attend. "Etymologically, *attend* means 'to stretch to'. . . .By metaphorical extension 'stretch to' became 'direct one's attention to,' . . . 'take care of'. . . 'be present'. . . 'look after'" (Ayto, 1990, p. 42). The word *attentive* asks us to submit to the discipline of what we are taking care of.



If I submit to being present and to listening attentively and obediently to the *community of truth* I may choose a good book, like Something From Nothing, to read to my students. I allow a space for my pleasure. I enjoy good literature and take pleasure in reading it to my students. The discussions that occur become rich and *delectable*. Because I find pleasure in this particular book and know it well, I am able to allow an open and multi-faceted conversation to emerge in these discussions.

Bloom is inspired by pedagogy which seeks the good (van Manen, 1982) and invites children to gather before us with faith. The children have the faith that we will offer them something of value. One way we do this is to offer a stance which values wonder and knowledge creation (Bruner, 1986). It is through an ongoing growth in our understanding of theory mediated through practice that this ability lives (Macdonald, 1982). We submit ourselves to listening attentively to the gap between practice and theory as we *stand under* and *listen from below*.

### Practice, Theory and Attentive Listening

The gap between theory and practice lives in the everyday world of teachers.

A topic that needs to be explored is how theory and practice inform each other. There seems to be a great distance between the theoretical understanding of reading and the living of reading in classrooms by teachers and students. The assumed reading relationship between theory and practice needs to be revisited. There is a need for understanding this relationship

differently. More understanding needs to develop in what actually happens in classrooms, in practice, when teachers teach reading and children are reading. A focus on the gap between theory and practice will allow for a better understanding of the relationship between the two which, in turn, will help children and teachers read in a way that is more meaningful to their lives. (Fox, 1996, p. 151)

The gap between theory and practice creates a space for pedagogues. How this space is handled makes a grave difference in our ability to work well, with the young, to create the bloom that Wendell Berry highlights.

It is in the relation between subject and object that practice and theory lives. In this relationship, we must learn to proceed with the care which may come about through attentive listening.

Wendell Berry writes that the human predicament asks us to attend and listen. It is spiritual.

It is a spiritual predicament, for it requires us to be properly humble and grateful; time and again, it asks us to be still and wait. But it is also a practical problem, for it requires us to *do* things. (Berry, 1987, p. 139)

Creating bloom may be accomplished through the careful treatment of teaching practice which is mediated by theory. Practice asks us to do things; it is the action by which tasks are completed and jobs are done.

Theory is being able to see things in a general way. It is the cognition of the ideas. It is the ability to observe and know. Heidegger tells us that careful observation must apply theory, or a

blind adherence to rules, which lives itself out in the form of a method, will occur.

"Practical" behavior is not "atheoretical" in the sense of the lack of seeing, and the difference between it and theoretical behavior lies not only in the fact that on the one hand we observe and on the other we *act*, and that action must apply theoretical cognition if it is not to remain blind. Rather, observation is a kind of taking care just as primordially as action has *its own* kind of seeing. Theoretical behavior is just looking noncircumspectly. Because it is noncircumspect, looking is not without rules; its canon takes shape in *method*. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 64)

In addition to the seeing eye nature of theory we need to activate attentive listening as a guide to our actions as pedagogues. If we act noncircumspectly, without care, judgement or phronesis, we rely on method to dictate our actions. The gap widens between theory and practice as the knowing and the being of teaching move apart.

Both van Manen and Gadamer offer us a view of theory. Van Manen says:

The Greek word *theoria* connotes "wakefulness of the mind" in the "contemplation" or "pure viewing" of truth. But truth in the Greek sense is not equivalent to our present notion of truth as a property of consensus among theorists or of the correspondence between a proposition and things described. Truth in the Greek sense refers us to the disclosure of the essential nature, the essence, or the good of things. (van Manen, 1982, p. 44)

Van Manen offers us a view of theory which works toward the essence or the good through wakefulness.

Gadamer's understanding of theory may also help us to proceed pedagogically. Theory or "theoria" as Gadamer discusses it is the "highest manner of being human."<sup>91</sup> (1994, p. 454). It is the place where quiet may begin to occur if attentive listening is present. He explains that theory is not a means to an end like so many of the practicalities of pedagogy which are required to get through the day. But, theory is a way to make the quiet place, to allow for the gap to begin to slow things down. It is a place requiring deep contemplation and understanding.

"Theoria grasps not so much the present-at-hand as the thing itself which still has the dignity of a 'thing'" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 455). Retaining the *dignity of the thing* suggests that when we validate the importance of finding the quiet place, we also hear the call of *the thing* and its subtleties.

As attentive listeners, we begin to hear the subtleties of the particular content that we are teaching, and we may live wisely in the relationship between theory and practice by making careful decisions which suit particular situations.

In the relationship between Grandfather and Joseph, for instance, Grandfather does not remove himself, nor Joseph, nor the blanket. His actions of deep consideration actualize the call of attentive listening that mediate this wise relationship between theory and practice.

Macdonald discusses the relationship between theory and practice in this way:

The test of "good" theory in practice is thus, not centrally that it works (i.e. that we can control practice), but that in the engagement of theory and practice we are emancipated from previous misunderstandings and are then freed to reinterpret situations and reach greater understandings. (Macdonald, 1982, p. 57)

Mother, in Gilman's book, is an example of someone who is not emancipated from the previous misunderstandings of her practice. For Mother, the blanket is an item to get rid of after it is worn out. She would rather get a new blanket after the wearing out of the old. She does not act in a listening manner with relation to Joseph. She acts as if the old is unimportant and the new is the thing of importance. This is similar to many of our situations in teaching. Over time, we have looked to prescriptive method for guidance as we attempt to live out theories. Often method lives as the guide to practical action. It lives between practice and theory.

### Opening Up Understanding in Teaching Methods

To be at home means to belong, to live in surroundings that are familiar, self-evident, and unobtrusive; its contrary *Fremdheit*, consists in the schism between past and present, I and others, self and world. Method derives from this sense of living among objects to which one no longer belongs. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 4)

To belong, as a teacher, means I need to be with the children as one who lives in their midst. Method is a difficult place to live as a teacher who has been in schools for many years. In university, I learned about teaching according to certain methods. In living

authentic existence, as Heidegger suggests, it is helpful to open up our understanding of the everydayness of teaching methods for several reasons. First, as teachers, we often take for granted aspects of our practice and "some of these assumptions may actually undermine" (Wilde, 1996, p. 136) our work. Second, methods often close down our understanding of pedagogy rather than open it up. Third, as a teacher of children who have reading and writing difficulties, a teacher's course of action in this area often becomes narrow and prescriptive. Procedures have traditionally evoked a prescriptive attitude to *fix* the children.

Methods are a helpful and necessary device for teachers; however, the decision to use methods which rely chiefly on prescription becomes a limiting factor. As a school administrator stated: "sometimes I think we operate in a vacuum as well and just doing things and we have no idea why. Somebody says do this and without the sort of thinking that needs to go on before [we do it]." By doing this a teacher may not invoke the phronesis or correct discipline necessary for right application.

Using methods prescriptively, we remove ourselves from the situation and look to method to make our work less complicated. "The main purpose of rational thought is to explain things so that we may predict and control them. Explain means to ex-plain or 'flatten out'" (Macdonald, 1982, p. 55). Jardine and Field remind us to bring the full difficulty back to teaching (Caputo cited in Jardine & Field, 1996). If we rely on methods with a prescriptive attitude, we flatten

out teaching and learning. "We need to find ways to give that subject a voice of its own, a voice that can speak its own truth and resist our tendency to reduce it to our terms. . . . To practice obedience to truth, we must strain to hear what the subject is saying about itself" (Palmer, 1993, p. 98). This listening attempts to reach beyond the methods themselves in search of a deeper understanding.

Levin tells us that, "before we can *hear* the truth, we must be *open* to listening" (1989, p. 245). In being open to listening something may sound forth that we do not expect. This happened to me recently. I had personal business to do with a lawyer who works out of her home. One evening, my husband and I went over to see her. We were greeted by her five year old who was very friendly. She asked questions about why we were there to see her mom. Then, her mom came to greet us and asked the little girl to go upstairs with her dad.

After our business together, the lawyer asked me, "Which is the best way to teach them to read? Is the whole language method or the phonics method the best way to do it?"

I answered this question by saying that teaching her daughter to read was not an either/or situation. I invoked the intricacy and the excitement of learning to read as the sharing of good literature and passing it on to the young. I told her that learning to read was an issue that could not be discussed in a five minute conversation, like the one we were having. This left her puzzled. She wanted me to recommend a book for her to read about the issue of whole

language or phonics as the best way to teach her child to read.

When I left the house I thought about her question, and began to wonder at how the teaching of reading had become equated with two seemingly opposing methodologies - whole language and phonics.

### Understanding Teaching Methods Differently

#### Method as closing the conversation

Methods, such as whole language and phonics, have long lived as a way for teachers to communicate; it is like the currency of exchange in the teaching profession. Methods guide our procedures as teachers but when methods become prescriptive there is a problem.

Using methodological language, we discuss the students and our many perceptions and frustrations with applying the method. For example, we discuss understanding as comprehension, we focus on miscues in reading analysis and we grade writing largely according to guides set out for us. These discussions center on the language of the method.

This focus on method can be limiting and frustrating. This frustration of teachers came forward in the whole language movement. I remember attending inservices and reading articles to aid the teaching of reading to the children. I was interested in using the ideas from these experiences with my students, but the ideas did not apply well to the grade one children in my particular setting. I



adjusted the ideas to the needs of the children in my situation. Yet, I had this feeling of frustration with the method when the children continued to experience difficulty. I felt that I had somehow let it down and that it had let me down as Jardine & Field (1996) agree in their article, "'Restoring [The] Life [of Language] to its Original Difficulty': On Hermeneutics, Whole Language, and 'Authenticity'". Whole language tried to create the literacy conditions which would beget universal success (Jardine & Field, 1996).

Then, the conversations between colleagues lives within the language and understanding of the particular method. For example, various colleagues have come to me to say things like, "This child can't print but, we're not supposed to teach them how to print in this new whole language philosophy." I heard their frustration of feeling like there were other people whose voices were telling them what to do. But the voices didn't really understand the children or the current situation. The conversation seemed one-sided and closed. The teachers, as participants, acted as though they didn't belong to the situation but felt as if they were standing on the outside looking in, listening to voices telling them the best way to proceed. The voices were those of prescription. The voices talked about the teaching of reading in general. The voices were thought to be the voices of the experts.

As teachers, we learn to talk in these voices too. Method is the language which we use to express our profession. This language of method is one which needs to be listened to in a different way. It

needs to be opened up and listened to attentively with *Gelassenheit*. In the search for understanding, we recognize the limits of teaching methods and the language we use to converse about them. We may then embrace a sense of the wildness that lives in the complexity of the world which is not controlled and itemized as it is in methodological teaching.

### **Method, margins and wilderness**

The survival of wilderness--of places that we do not change, where we allow the existence even of creatures we perceive as dangerous--is necessary. Our sanity probably requires it. Whether we go to those places or not, we need to know that they exist. And I would argue that we do not need just the great public wildernesses, but millions of small private or semiprivate ones. Every farm should have one; wildernesses can occupy corners of factory grounds and city lots--places where nature is given a free hand, where no human work is done, where people go only as guests. These places function, I think, whether we intend them to or not, as sacred groves--places we respect and leave alone, not because we understand well what goes on there, but because we do not. (Berry, 1987, p. 17)

In teaching, methods are often the basis of the language which we use to converse about reading and writing. As I have previously mentioned, methodological language is like a teacher's currency. It is the way to trade knowledge, observations and experience. But, there is more to situations than that. I believe, as teachers, we know this but we may have difficulty conversing differently about teaching.

Wildernesses are a form of respite for us as human beings. In teaching, there are wildernesses which we need to validate. The

wildernesses live both inside and outside our classrooms. Like *hap*, (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 8) these wildernesses exist as an aspect of being. Just as *hap* points the way home because it is the "remainder of the primordial unity of self and world that method, however rigorous, is not entirely able to break up" (Weinsheimer, 1985, P. 15), the sacred groves are there for us to find our way home.

We go to wilderness places to be restored, to be instructed in the natural economies of fertility and healing, to admire what we cannot make. Sometimes, as we find to our surprise, we go to be chastened or corrected. And we go in order to return with renewed knowledge by which to judge the health of our human economy and our dwelling places. (Berry, 1987, p. 17)

Restoring our fertility and encouraging healing is necessary in teaching today (Palmer, 1993, p. x). A sense of restoration may be accomplished by opening up our horizons, as teachers, to deeper understanding as we work toward the recognition of authentic existence in our everydayness. Restoration may also be accomplished by broadening our horizons through taking courses at the university and doing rigorous reading. However, restoration is difficult, in these times, where increasing demands upon teachers make it onerous to pursue further study. It becomes difficult to take the time to listen and risk new adventure.

The sense of risk and wildness is important to consider. By repeating what we have done in our classrooms in the past, we tread the safe road. Teaching becomes flattened out, smooth and very predictable. By going to wildernesses, we cultivate a sense of adventure and risk. In turn, our teaching becomes riskier, alive, and

exciting. Going to new places and doing new things rejuvenates teaching.

By entering into a wilderness, such as the university (Palmer, 1993), we are encouraged to listen attentively in relation to the methods, monocultures and procedures we choose to educate the young.

Looking at monocultures of industrial civilization, we yearn with a kind of homesickness for the humanness and the naturalness of a highly diversified, multipurpose landscape, democratically divided, with many margins. The margins are of utmost importance. They are the divisions between holdings, as well as between kinds of work and kinds of land. These margins--lanes, streamsidcs, wooded fencerows, and the like--are always freeholds of wildness, where limits are set on human intention. Such places are hospitable to the wild lives of plants and animals and to the wild play of human children. They enact, within the bounds of human domesticity itself, a human courtesy toward the wild that is one of the best safeguards of designated tracts of true wilderness. This is the landscape of harmony, safer far for life of all kinds than the landscape of monoculture. And we should not neglect to notice that, whereas the monoculture landscape is totalitarian in tendency, the landscape of harmony is democratic and free. (Berry, 1987, p. 151)

When we, as teachers, belong to the classroom life in the sense of being a part of the wildness, there is a sense of relief. We no longer hold onto the sense of limit, control and closure that method implies. We can live out our diversity and complexity by allowing the natural difficulty inherent in our task as teachers to surface. By refusing to believe that the monoculture of method is all there is to teaching we return teaching to its real difficulty.

I believe there is a sense of relief when we come out of our classroom to live in the wildernesses in a way which allows us to breathe, to continue to belong, to remain present in our world, and in our teaching. The wildernesses with their sacred groves and these margins help to remind us of our kin in the world (Jardine, 1994b, p. xviii) outside the school boundaries.

### The permeability of language

We may better comprehend this curious development--the withdrawal of mind from sensible nature and its progressive incarceration in the human skull--by considering that every human language secretes a kind of perceptual boundary that hovers, like a translucent veil, between those who speak that language and the sensuous terrain that they inhabit. As we grow into a particular culture or language, we implicitly begin to structure our sensory contact with the earth around us in a particular manner, paying attention to certain phenomena while ignoring others, differentiating textures, tastes, and tones in accordance with the verbal contrasts contained in the language. We simply cannot take our place within any community of human speakers without ordering our sensations in a common manner, and without thereby limiting our spontaneous access to the wild world that surrounds us. Any particular language or way of speaking thus holds us within a particular community of human speakers only by invoking an ephemeral border, or boundary, between our sensing bodies and the sensuous earth.

Nevertheless, the perceptual boundary constituted by any language may be exceedingly porous and permeable. Indeed, for many oral, indigenous peoples, the boundaries enacted by their languages are more like permeable membranes binding the peoples to their particular terrains, rather than barriers walling them off from the land. (Abram, 1996, p. 255-256)

The language community that exists for us, as teachers, is one which has structured our understanding and perceptions. As we discuss specific tenets about the teaching of reading or writing, we use certain terms. Often these terms become stagnant and closed. Our language is not porous. Duckspeak is a term used for language which is closed and non-porous (Daly cited in Jardine, 1994b, p. 117).

Applying this ideal of the political language to the realm of educational language, we note the similarities between duckspeak and our unintended curricular obscenities. "Time on task ratios," "studenting behaviors," "career and life management," "displays a mastery of appropriate management skills geared to the perceived needs of individual students." Quack." (Jardine, 1994b, p. 117-118)

We often simplify our speech "in the service of objectivity and repeatability and accuracy," (Jardine, 1994, p. 117). And this move "siphons off the warm, difficult resonances of things that makes speech stumble, that makes speech alluring" (Jardine, 1994, p. 117).

In spite of our wish to make speech simple, straightforward and objective with *duckspeak*, we often misunderstand the terms spoken of. Preconceived notions abound due to different factors which include closed language membranes and a lack of time to explore meaning.

An example of this comes forward in the term *whole language*. At one time, whole language was in vogue. It was understood as the way to proceed in the teaching of language arts. Then, the term fell into disfavor due to many factors, one being the misunderstanding of the philosophy by many teachers who were not able to find the quiet

place to deeply consider it. I include a quote from an interview with a school administrator.

We [the staff] talked a lot about whole language and how that philosophy had been misinterpreted and reduced to kind of a package. And there were lots of questions about that and there was, I guess, a belief on our part that teachers abandoned children to endless writing, endless reading of whatever they chose to read. And, so our investigations were actually about how important the teacher's role was in all of this and that whole language did not mean that you left them to figure things out. And, that there was a structure, a very rigorous kind of programming expectation for kids. How the literature had been misread somehow from the theorists who put the idea forward and it was a little bit shaky. And, I think they're looking at their work now and saying indeed that it needed to be more clearly outlined for teachers. It required a little bit more substance and maybe a little bit more direction in the early writing. And, then I also think we know how professional development and inservice doesn't necessarily impact teachers' practice as it often trivializes something that could be quite beautiful and quite wonderful.

The term *whole language* resulted in a great deal of misunderstanding. Parents gradually viewed this term as a permissive type of teaching that was undesirable. After this turn of events, I was cautioned by two different administrators, on two separate staffs, not to use this term in relation to the teaching of language arts because it had negative interpretations by parents, teachers and administrators.

I found this example one which resulted from the lack of understanding and conversation between teachers and theorists, between teachers and teachers, and between teachers and parents.

This is one casualty from the lack of attentive listening evident in our profession. This is not to say that whole language was, or is, the desired philosophy, but that the ability to speak and listen well is often limited by the constraints of haste and *duckspeak*; the pigeon-holing of language and words becomes part of the practices of teaching. Proceeding in this manner often does not allow for gaps or quiet places. The teaching may become reductionistic and pigeon-holed. Everything becomes tidy and organized for quick access. The curriculum loses its chances for generativity, and the horizons are narrowed. Methodology can take over as the significant way of proceeding. Methodology may take us where we want to go in the least possible time and with the least variance. The space becomes prescriptive. The gaps begin to close.

And, so it has been with a belief in method which wants to fill the gaps. There is little space allowed for growth, for generativity, for possibility. With this attitude the language curriculum can become a place of predetermined ideas and beliefs which are merely transmitted to the young.

Finally, the world we work with, the curriculum, is itself an archive of the look as it is a collection and ordering for representation of the signs of our collective experience. It is the teacher who responds to the curriculum as a living sign beckoning us to the world that moves beneath it and curls up against its edges. Or it is the teacher who presents curriculum as a prohibition. NO TRESPASSING, a sign that denies access,



enforces distance, and walls off the world. When curriculum is alive, it invites the student to reappropriate it as she reclaims her identity from its origin in her parents' look, grasping and dislodging and reclaiming its perspective. When the curriculum is a dead sign, all of us, teachers and students, stumble under its empty stare. (Grumet, 1988, p. 116)

If our stance to the teaching of language arts is a possessive one, like that embodied in teaching method, it may close off the possibilities and discourage the students from entering into it (Palmer, 1993, p. 104). How we view language in the pedagogy of reading and writing gravely affects our view of curriculum and our stance with the students.

How we, as teachers, view language makes a huge difference in how we, as pedagogues living in the gap between theory and practice, ask our students to respond to language in their daily reading and writing. How we ask them to come to listen to the voices of literature and non-fiction is reflected in our understanding of language. It is in this gap that we must be attentive listeners to the quiet places in which the promise of language lives.

Perhaps then we can value pedagogical decisions which are well thought out and which ask us to lead carefully by attending to the permeability of language which opens itself to the world. If we are unable to open a space in our understanding of language then "truth is mistakenly thought to reside in the teacher's personal relation to the subject, and not in the widening network of relationships the community of truth requires" (Palmer, 1993, p. 105).

Our openness to understanding epistemology (how we know reality), ontology (the nature of reality) and pedagogy (how we teach and learn) is integral to our ability to remain open in interpretive work.

"Interpretation is a keeping open and it is a profound form of *weakness*" (Jardine, 1994b, p. 85). Being weak is difficult as a teacher. This weakness, when viewed as permeability, allows us the invitation of opening. The possibility of dead-air space being the teacher's worst nightmare (Smith, 1994, p. 69) changes and offers space which calls us to listen to our own way of knowing and thinking about pedagogy.

Is silence and nothing productive? Only if we may clear a space for thinking differently about pedagogy. If we validate the importance of the world as a valid part of our pedagogical reality we may then understand *weakness* differently. Openness may be listened to as a place of permeability from which strength and understanding may grow. Then, perhaps, we may learn to speak well to each other.

For example, at a local school the concept of professional development allows space to include reading articles recommended by the university to promote openness and deeper understanding of curriculum. As the school administrator stated when discussing this professional development:

We allow for lots of discussion, lots of talk and conversation that in the usual rush of things, and in the past history of professional development, we haven't valued as important, the significance of conversations. So we have slowed it right down in that sense so that a lot of it centers around the conversations and giving some time when people can actually construct some other thinking on paper.

In allowing time, we may take the opportunity to listen attentively, to open up and speak well to each other about pedagogy.

To listen attentively means to understand teaching language arts as more than a conversation about method. In this way we may remain present in our work with children. And, like Henry Besuden and Grandfather, we can create bloom for ourselves and our particular students.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### LISTENING TO ANOTHER QUIET PLACE

#### Limits to Openness

To begin this section I offer a quote from an interview with a school administrator who is working with her staff to open up their curricular understanding.

it is a huge matter and just talking about the bigness of it and not letting it go anywhere and everywhere nor letting it come back down to something that is pretty inconsequential. Something we did feel with it, with the whole idea of generative curriculum, though, is that it does go out and then there's a need to pull it back in again. And then it goes out until its undulating like that somehow and if you're not careful, it keeps going like this (she motions by putting her hands wide apart in the air). So a teacher's role is to pull it back into something that feels manageable and that there are some realities always in our world and one of them is the realities of the achievement tests.

In all of this work so far, I discuss the necessity of openness. In this sense of openness, as the above quotation outlines, there is a need to pull back at certain times. As teachers, we need a limit to our openness.

"The workload is phenomenal," states this school administrator. We need to make our work manageable in the everyday world. Palmer (1993) speaks of the necessity of boundaries to openness which are enacted with a sense of hospitality, a welcoming. We must go about our business of getting through each day and the

practicalities of preparing for lessons, gathering materials, discussions with colleagues, and doing our daily chores at home. If we are endlessly open, we experience a sense of paralysis. We are unable to act or proceed. To carry on, Heidegger suggests that we must become resolute.

According to Heidegger, we are being resolute when we seize possibility. Yet, he stressed that possibility is not totally open and infinite, possibility is determined by factual circumstances. Resoluteness involves taking hold of what is possible given the understanding of these particular circumstances. Therefore, to be resolute one must be able to deeply understand the situation at hand. (Wilde, 1996, p. 118)

In being with others Berry (1987, p. 154) also points out that there are necessary limits which guide our actions. In attentive listening and *Gelassenheit* a balance which limits openness exists. We cannot do whatever we choose. We are sometimes severely limited by a specific situation and we must take care of the things at hand.

*Gelassenheit* is an equanimity which enables us to listen and respond with much greater intelligence, much greater situation-appropriateness. If what presents itself is really evil, the vibrations and tones manifesting that evil will be heard all the more keenly and accurately; as a matter of fact, evils that otherwise could not be heard at all would be discerned much more precisely, because the attunement, the silence of listening, would let them reverberate, and disclose more of their sense, within its echoic space. *Gelassenheit* in listening does not mean quietism or docility. Quite the contrary. It is the most intelligent ground for responsive action. (Levin, 1989, p. 228-229)

Becoming *resolute* means deeply understanding the situation at hand. It requires the quiet place of *Gelassenheit* and attentive listening. Understanding the particular circumstance is crucial for resoluteness and responsive action. Responsive action calls for listening to knowing and being. Harkening is a listening understanding which lives within this space.

### **Harkening: A Listening Which Understands**

I introduce the discussion of hearkening, a listening which understands, with a collection of quotes.

Only when the existential possibility of discourse and hearing are given, can someone hearken. He who "cannot hear" and "must feel" can perhaps hearken very well precisely for this reason. Just listening around is a privation of the hearing that understands. Discourse and hearing are grounded in understanding. Understanding comes neither from a lot of talking nor from busy listening around. Only he who already understands is able to listen. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 154)

since hearkening is a listening informed by an achieved ontological understanding, an authentic understanding of Being, its achievement becomes the *normative* basis for all our subsequent auditory experiences. (Levin, 1989, p. 230)

hearkening may be described as 'setting the tone' for all our hearing. (Levin, 1989, p. 230)

hearkening may also be called 'the condition of possibility'. (Levin, 1989, p. 230)

Harkening is a mode of being which understands. It opens up

a space and allows what is significant to come forward. It is listening which does more than hear; it opens a space for understanding. In this space, sensitive pedagogical decisions based upon being and grounded in understanding are possible. For example, hearkening is the kind of listening that Grandfather provides for Joseph in Something From Nothing. And, hearkening is cultivated in Joseph by his attending to Grandfather.

### **Hearkening and The Character of Pedagogy**

Taking care of the things at hand requires us to act with character. Like the characters in Something From Nothing, actions are necessary. Hearkening allows for openness and the possibility of conversation. Hearkening seeks to understand in a deeper way. The demands of the particular situation need to be taken into consideration as well as the characteristics of a larger context. *Bildung*, tact, *sensus communis*, fusion of horizons, and heedful circumspection, which will be further discussed in this chapter, are ways to enact hearkening and limits. *Gelassenheit* and hearkening depend upon application of the guiding concepts of humanism (Gadamer, 1994) when making the daily practical decisions in pedagogy.

In the validating the difficulty of being-in-the-world we, as teachers, could talk about teaching differently. Instead of a focus upon specific methods, we may focus upon the character of teaching. By doing this, we may give credibility to the particular situations

encountered in the day to day teaching decisions.

The character of teaching lies in the quiet place of hearkening. However, this character is not deemed important if we think of pedagogy as the mere present-at-hand.

Heidegger referred to the Cartesian tendency to equate the existence of something with objective, listable, characteristics making something 'present-at-hand'. He showed that in doing this something is lost; it is a narrowing of understanding. According to Heidegger, it is the ontological question, or the question of being that is lost.

For Descartes, the existence of something could not be proven unless it could be made present-at-hand. In other words, Being, the existence of something, can not be proven unless it constantly remains as it is. And the only way to be certain of constancy is through the use of mathematical or physical proof. (Wilde, 1996, p. 44-45)

Teaching with this notion of present-at-hand would welcome teaching methods as a way to replicate, reproduce and supposedly ensure desired results. There is a difference between using teaching methods prescriptively and employing the understanding which comes from listening. Working to understand pedagogy lives in a place which is more spacious than the present-at-hand.

Heidegger and Gadamer bring forth several precepts which address the character of being in the world which have an impact upon us, as teachers, in our work with children. Gadamer (1994, p. 9) calls these precepts the guiding concepts of humanism. Gilman's character of Grandfather helps us to understand these guiding concepts of humanism.



## Guiding Concepts of Humanism

### *Bildung*

general characteristic of *Bildung*: keeping oneself open to what is other, more universal points of view. It embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to universality. To distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes means to look at these in the way that others see them. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 17)

The guiding concepts of humanism require hearkening, a listening which understands. Teaching requires understandings which grasp more than just the present-at-hand. Grandfather, in Gilman's book, exemplifies hearkening and *Bildung*. He acts with character which takes time to accumulate and form.

Grandfather, more than Mother, offers Joseph the right action needed for heeding the young boy's requests. He inspires Joseph. Grandfather demonstrates a wisdom acquired by attentive listening forming a sense of *Bildung*. According to Gadamer, *Bildung* grows "out of an inner process of formation and cultivation" (1994, p. 11). It is the basis of the human sciences. "In *Bildung* one leaves the all-too-familiar and learns to allow for what is different from oneself, and that means not only to tolerate it but to live in it. It is oneself that one finds in the alien, even when feeding with the swine" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 70). This means that we welcome others and our world as part of our process of becoming someone.

Yet, this welcoming also encourages a manner of distancing in order to understand situations. *Bildung* is a process by which man is

"getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 14). It is learning to understand and appreciate self and others together as participants in the world. We are born with a horizon and prejudices as a place from which to grow. As teachers, this idea shakes up our insistence upon individually constructed knowledge which lives itself out in the reconstruction of facts. *Bildung* hears understanding as a mediation between self and others in the world.

*Bildung*, according to Gadamer, denotes formation and is a process of becoming--this formation becomes more a result of the process of becoming than the process itself--and is a process of formation and cultivation rather than technical construction (1994, p. 11). We live in a continual state of *Bildung*. It is not a means to an end but lives in the cultivation of a properly humble human being. *Bildung* lives in teachers who are educated citizens of the world. As a school administrator points out:

And just being ready [is required] all the time as a teacher. So being educated citizens of the world. That how you live your own life will have a very significant impact. You can create this wonderful kind of curriculum, but if you never read any beautiful pieces of literature, if you never see significant movies, if you don't travel, if you don't engage in conversations with people who do other kinds of things in life. Then that probably is going to hinder your ability to create curriculum for the kids. It speaks a little about experts and we [the staff] have gone back and forth with that, back and forth. We tried to staff the school so that we have people with really strong backgrounds. So our professional development has actually

energized us and then we can take chaos theory and the whole idea of fractiles and how it's a different kind of geometry than in schools and although it's not on the curriculum it can certainly add to our curriculum. . . . You have to constantly ask yourself if you are on the wrong track ever, if that's what you are doing. But they [the teachers] need a lot of fascination and they did need to talk a lot with a fellow colleague.

The process of *Bildung* requires this kind of an attitude. An openness to consider the world, yet the ability to enact limits when necessary.

### **Tact**

By "tact" we understand a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 16)

For the tact which functions in the human sciences is not simply a feeling and unconscious, but is at the same time a mode of knowing and a mode of being. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 16)

Tact offers us, as teachers, the possibility of weaving the knowledge of our theories with the reality of particular classroom situations. For example, tact helps us to know what not to teach a child at a particular time. Having taught many children in grade one, it took me time to develop the tact to hold back. I had to learn that I should not just barge in and overwhelm a child with new knowledge and skills unless it was an appropriate time for him/her to learn such material.

Van Manen offers further insights in our search for understanding tact. "The increasing ability to serve the good in our lives with children we might then call 'pedagogic wisdom' which

actualizes itself in 'pedagogic tact'" (1982, p. 47). He adds: "Theory is immanently practical since it derives its *raison d'être* from the fact that every concrete or particular situation in which adults find themselves with children is practical, requires practical action, pedagogic tactfulness" (1982, p. 47).

For example, Grandfather embodies a sense of tact by acting in a thoughtful manner within the particular situation. He knows just what to make for Joseph at that time. We are called as teachers to use our tact when making decisions which herald from particular situations.

### Sensus communis

The main thing for our purposes is that here *sensus communis* obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community. . . .developing this communal sense is of decisive importance for living. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 21)

In discussing *Bildung*, tact and *sensus communis* Gadamer highlights the importance of the community, the culture within which we live. The appropriate action is dictated by the particular community in question. In the community of schools and teachers not just any action will do. The actions which reach toward growth and change need to come from *Gelassenheit*, attentive listening and hearkening. Otherwise a tragedy of judgement could take place because not just anything is possible.

knowledge, like everything else, has its place, and that we need urgently now to *put* it in its place. If we want to know and cannot help knowing, then let us learn as fully and accurately as we decently can. But let us at the same time abandon our superstitious beliefs about knowledge: that it is ever sufficient; that it can of itself solve problems; that it is intrinsically good; that it can be used objectively or disinterestedly. (Berry, 1983, p. 66)

Sensus communis is helpful when making decisions because it asks us to understand the context and knowledge of a particular situation. Grandfather exemplifies sensus communis through his sensitive treatment of the blanket. He uses his knowledge, judgement and experience, as a tailor, to craft well for Joseph.

An example from a school administrator exemplifies sensus communis. In being open and making changes in curriculum there is questioning from parents. These questions are addressed with sensus communis. This is how the parental concerns are handled:

I've said to a couple of parents when they said: "I don't see the disciplines in this", that it would be far easier, easy for us, to retreat right back into the textbooks and have every kid on the same page at the same time. If anybody challenges me I use that little argument. And is that something that they would like for their child? Do they value that as important themselves? All in the same place at the same time, and that usually quells any kind of fussing.

This response understands the parents, the children and the curriculum. It addresses the context of the community well. It embodies sensus communis.

### **Heedful circumsppection**

Taking care of things is guided by circumsppection which discovers things at hand and preserves them in discoveredness. Circumsppection gives to all our teaching and performing its route of procedure, the means of doing something, the right opportunity, the proper moment. Taking care of things can rest in the sense of one's interrupting the performance and taking a rest, or of one's finishing something. Taking care of things does not disappear in rest, but circumsppection becomes free, it is no longer bound in the work-world. When it rests, care turns into circumsppection which has become free. The circumspect discovery of the work-world has the character of being of de-distancing. Circumsppection which has become free no longer has anything at hand which it has to bring near. Essentially de-distancing, it provides new possibilities of de-distancing for itself, that is, it tends to leave the things nearest at hand for a distant and strange world, care turns into taking care of possibilities. (Heidegger, 1996, p. 161)

circumsppection. . .while concerned with the individual situation or business, remains open to observing what else might be necessary. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 13)

Heedful circumsppection guides teachers who strive to understand authentic existence. Heedful circumsppection means giving space to the work-world, and being able to see things in a way that distances us from the particular situation in order to allow us to proceed in a careful manner. It allows us to remain present in the situation, yet to create a healthy, respectful and wise distance.

Grandfather is a strong example of someone who is able to distance himself from the situation in order to proceed with care, yet he honors the relationship between all aspects of the situation. As

one of the boys in my reading group said: "Every time it [the blanket] gets wrecked he takes it and he cuts it, and Grandpa fixes it and snips it and makes it into another thing."

By stepping back, Grandfather is able to attend to the best way to proceed. This is what Heidegger refers to as de-distancing (1996, p. 161) as part of heedful circumspection. It is a creating of space for understanding which allows for the complexity and richness of pedagogy. This sings out against the flattening simplicity and control of method. And, perhaps this is why Grandfather is able to realize the importance of remaking the blanket for Joseph. Mother is too close to the situation, and does not allow space for possibility. Grandfather is able to weave both practice and theory by standing back and using heedful circumspection.

### **Fusion of horizons**

The concept of the fusion of horizons is important to consider at this point. Gadamer writes: "The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (1994, p. 302). In enhancing our understanding, horizons enable us to look far and wide at a situation. It is like being on the prairies where one is able to see the entire horizon at sunrise.

However, if our view is limited, we may also become limited in our understanding of things. "A person who has no horizon does not see far enough and hence overvalues what is nearest to him" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 302). This is often what happens to us in the realm of the everydayness of living where the pragmatic concerns of

taking attendance, practicing for fire drills and correcting the latest assignment take precedence. The classroom walls become encapsulating, and teachers are stuck in their limited perspectives without realizing it (Zais cited in Pinar, 1995, p. 688).

Mother also has a narrow horizon in her everyday existence. She demonstrates encapsulation. She, like so many of us as teachers, needs to remember to listen beyond the constraints of the present situation. Grandfather, having been around for many more years, holds an expansive fusion of horizons. This benefits Joseph and attests to Grandfather's sense of authentic existence, hearkening and *Bildung*.

But, "to acquire a horizon means that one learns to look beyond what is close at hand--not in order to look away but to see it better, within a larger whole and in truer proportion" (Gadamer, 1994, p. 305). It means to use heedful circumspection and listen beyond our everyday existence.

As teachers, we must be able to look beyond our own present set of circumstances, as Gadamer suggests in his fusion of horizons. If we see only what is right before us, we tend to overvalue our own knowledge, and we become too subjective. In this way, decisions for change may be shallow and inadequate as they do not consider the complexity of a larger, more inclusive situation.



Our ability to enact limits to openness demands understanding with hearkening and with character. A character of pedagogy lives within the guiding concepts of humanism offered by Gadamer and Heidegger. These qualities create space for listening, and guide us to acting well through experience and memory.

## CHAPTER SIX

### LISTENING AND MEMORY

#### Lengthening of Memory and the Character of Pedagogy

I would like to begin this section with a quote from a school administrator who discusses teacher wellness:

I think teacher wellness is connected to doing your job well. . . .I think they're [the teachers in the school] are doing very well because they get a lot of recognition for what they are doing. There are lots of people coming through to ask questions about what they're doing. . . .They get their wellness, in my opinion, through that for doing a job well. And it's the same, I know, that we've thrown out that whole self-esteem issue with children as a separate entity, but I think everybody believes now that self-esteem is attached directly to feeling successful with the work that you have to do. And I know that we can't just tell children that they've done a wonderful job and give them credit when there's someone doing a much more wonderful job and they're wondering why they're getting the same recognition or everything seems like it's good regardless of whether it's good or not. I think it builds a huge amount of cynicism in kids, certainly as they get older and look back on their school career. I think it's the same thing for teachers. I don't think there's any sense of satisfaction in our work unless we're doing something well. I don't want to be dismissed as a school marm.

Doing a job well requires a sense of hearkening which takes time to acquire. To act well, with hearkening, requires formation of character. Character involves an individual and a collection of individuals. Therefore, the question of character in pedagogy operates on more than an individual basis. Berry (1983) tells us that

inwardly, character is individual, and outwardly, it works itself out as a collective culture:

But our decisions can also be informed--our loves both limited and strengthened--by those patterns of value and restraint, principle and expectation, memory, familiarity, and understanding that, inwardly, add up to *character* and, outwardly, to *culture*. Because of these patterns, and only because of them, we are not alone in the bewilderments of the human condition and human love, but have the company and the comfort of the best of our kind, living and dead. These patterns constitute a knowledge far different from the kind I have been talking about. It is a kind of knowledge that includes information, but is never the same as information. Indeed, if we study the paramount documents of our culture, we will see that this second kind of knowledge invariably implies, and often explicitly imposes, limits upon the first kind: some possibilities must not be explored; some things must not be learned. If we want to get safely home, there are certain seductive songs we must not turn aside for, some sacred things we must not meddle with. (Berry, 1983, p. 68-69)

Individually, character allows us to apply knowledge that is not simply facts and figures. It allows us to exercise qualities which "would preserve good care and good work through hard times" (Berry, 1983, p. 72). Character, as stated by Wendell Berry involves memory. It is not a memory for just anything.

Memory must be formed; for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another. It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man. (Gadamer, 1994, p. 16)

It is within this understanding of memory that we find our character and our place in the grand scheme of things. We look to the past to nourish our sense of the present. What is possible in the present is often built upon the memories we have from the past. Wendell Berry brings forward this idea in a metaphor of farming. If we stay on a farm for a long time, for a period of several generations, there is a lengthening of memory. "And, the land would not have to pay the cost for the trial-and-error education for every owner" (p. 78). Previous decisions and the resulting success and mistakes would be remembered.

The land would not be overworked and the land would be well taken care of because the future owners would be part of one's family, one's children or grandchildren. And there would be better care in the workmanship of the buildings like barns and chicken coops so one did not have to rebuild every few years. Additionally, the development of the concept of how much is enough for this farm in terms of power, livestock and crop production would be possible only after the long memory of land owned for a long time and cared for well. (p. 79)

This metaphor of lengthening of memory is relevant and needed in the culture of pedagogy. In teaching reading and writing we have often proceeded with theories or methods which do not validate the past learning of our profession. We forge forward, looking to the new with hope, yet we often ignore the learning of the past in education, and the children of today pay the price, much like the overworked land in Wendell Berry's example.

The following quote attests to this overworking of the land in education during the past century:

The history of our educational system for the last quarter of a century has been a history of crazes--the method craze, the object lesson craze, the story-telling craze, the phonic craze, the vertical writing craze, the examination madness. (A. Kirk Cameron, 1904) (cited in Tomkins, 1986, p. 98)

Fiumara explains a reason for this *craze*.

When the capacity for symbol formation tends to degrade, the recourse to presumed sources of knowledge and the search for some kind of trend in which one can believe become increasingly vehement. (1990, p. 86).

In contrast, this lengthening of memory serves us well in the development of a character of pedagogy. As in *sensus communis*, we look to the community for wisdom to proceed. An individual is always part of a larger community or culture. And, the community, for good work to exist, must be a good community.

For good farming to last, it must occur in a good farming community--that is, a neighborhood of people who know each other, who understand their mutual dependencies, and who place a proper value on good farming. In its cultural aspect, the community is an order of memories preserved consciously in instructions, songs, and stories, and both consciously and unconsciously in *ways*. A healthy culture holds preserving knowledge *in place* for a *long* time. That is, the essential wisdom accumulates in the community much as fertility builds in the soil. (Berry, 1983, p. 72-73)

In a fertile community, pedagogues are seen as being able to build and sustain relationships with content, children and colleagues. In the future, if we wish to move toward a fertile pedagogy, we need to listen carefully to today's challenges and become open to the ideas and thoughts of others. As well, we need to validate the past by

developing a stronger community of older, experienced teachers, open to possibility, who mentor the young teachers by cultivating a healthy community that is fertile. Gadamer agrees, he believes in being addressed by a tradition instead of constructing theory after theory (1994, p. 453) and always beginning again. And teacher wellness may flourish in this fertile community of doing well a job which is built upon memory.

### Curriculum as Story and the Lengthening of Memory

The song of this truth, the truth of our historical entrustment, has been sung many, many times, preserved in an echo of ancient, ancestral voices reverberating through time, binding generations to generations with a wisdom of all its own. And yet, somehow, it has still not been heard; for in a sense we need to think, it can be heard only in a time which has awakened to its passing, the truth of its impermanence, its perishing, its irretrievable absence. Let us try, then, for a passing moment, to lend an ear to this song. (Levin, 1989, p. 271)

In learning about *our historical entrustment* I would like to repeat one of the statements from my reading group that has already been mentioned: "If he [Grandfather] just threw it [the blanket] out there's not much of a story to tell about." This comment reminds us of the importance of memory in listening and in the telling of stories. This student's comment is an insightful one which we need to listen to with hearkening.

During this same conversation, I asked the students, who were reading Something From Nothing with me, what difference Grandfather's choice to remake the blanket would make for Joseph in the future. One of the children responded: "He might make a blanket for his grandson when he gets older." One of the other children in the group said, "Yeah, generations." Then several of the other children in the group repeated simultaneously, "Generations, generations, generations. It goes on and on."

Then I asked the children why Joseph would make another blanket for his grandson or granddaughter. One of them replied: "Probably it's a good memory for him, and he will be able to remember it better and make his grandson have a memory."

Next I asked why they thought this memory is so important to Joseph. One of the boys answered: "This memory is gonna be so important to him because he had something like a star and a moon blanket, and he's probably going to tell his grandson that he had it when he was little. Then probably Joseph will know ahead of time that his grandson or granddaughter will keep on coming back to him and asking if he could fix it. So its gonna go on and on."

Another of the boys answered, "I think the memory would be important because his grandfather made it [the blanket] and he knows how his grandfather fixed it for him and he probably liked that, liked that lots, and it'll probably be a good memory. Probably he liked how his grandfather fixed it so he could have it over and over again."

I asked if they thought Joseph will make the same things his grandfather made him from the blanket. They all agree Joseph would make something different from the new material for his own grandchild. He would not merely replicate the steps made by his grandfather but would begin again, the same yet different, for his own grandchild, as the story goes on and on and on.

What would be the face of pedagogy oriented by healthy remembrance. . . .it gathers students and teachers together in a genuine conversation about life. . . .such a teacher also pays attention to that profound silence which often comes from children, and regards such silences not as voids to be filled with yet more facts, but as living spaces which are a sign that memory is in formation.

To remember that pedagogy is concerned with the formation of memory means to be fully responsive to the conditions by which a person learns to remember well. And remembering well does not mean just remembering happy times, that is, suppressing the fire by which we might be refined. More importantly, remembering well means remembering how each of us might struggle through life's bittersweetness with the kind of courage that enables life to go on. Good memory, then, is oriented toward the future, but realistically, not in a utopian fashion. A realistic future recognizes that whatever the future will be, it will contain what can endure today. (Smith, 1994, p. 180-181)

Memory in formation (in-formation) is a different way to hearken to curriculum and children. Memory in formation encourages, creates and requires quiet places and space in both children and teachers. Again, Grandfather mediates memory in-formation for Joseph. He is a teacher who remembers well.



A teacher who remembers well teaches curriculum as a story, not just as a collection of trivia which seems to have no connection with anything but itself and which must be remembered in an unhealthy way, that is, crammed, to pass an exam. Teaching curriculum as a story means that teachers must be prepared in such a way as to be able to show that there are never facts without people for whom facts count as such and that all things read in books are somehow answers to questions that people pose or once posed. (Smith, 1994, p. 180)

Memory and the importance of story are written about by Berry (1987), Levin (1989) and Abram (1996). When we transfer the importance of story and memory to education, it may create a curriculum which is based upon "good stories, large fields of thought, 'big ideas' (Clifford & Friesen, 1993) that need children to re-think them, that are *that* generous and true" (Jardine, 1996, p. 53).

Curriculum as story belies a certain coherence and pleasure. Bloom lives in this pleasure. As a story, curriculum implies the importance of listening and leaves open a space for young and old. It allows for education as the process of cultivation and formation of *Bildung*. The facts relevant in certain disciplines seem to have kin and kinship (Jardine, 1994b, p. v) when curriculum as story is a possibility, "the pace of attention slows and broadens and becomes more stable, less frantic. We don't need to speed ahead, to keep up, to crowd and cram the classroom with activity after activity. We can slow and settle and return" (Jardine, 1996, p. 52).

*Gelassenheit* creates the conditions for understanding and returning to good stories like Something From Nothing. If this

openness is encouraged by such stories, the wisdom of hearkening may follow. In this way, memory and understanding go on and on, as the children stated, and we are all in the midst of these stories at once at home and present to the subtleties of everyday with a sense of authentic existence. Listening to stories creates memories which may gather young and old together in the bonds of history.

At the dawn of western civilization, history was entrusted to an oral/aural tradition of sages and poets, elders with voices pleasing to the ear. And the intimate bonds that brought mortals together to hear the stories of their history belonged to the understanding of hearing. Once upon a time, hearing belonged to history; and history belonged to hearing. But now this kind of history, history in the keeping of our hearing, has virtually disappeared - except perhaps in some rural communities, isolated families, and urban ghettos. Written history is not the same: it is bereft of the power in sound to touch, to penetrate, to move, to gather. When people ceased to tell one another their histories, myths, legends and tales, and ceased to listen, to take the time to listen, something of the element in which historical gathering lives passed away in silence. (Levin, 1989, p. 271)

## EPILOGUE

### THE SPACE BETWEEN THE SPOKES REVISITED

"If you listen then you can remember."

This statement was given by one of my students during a lesson of summary on the events and understandings of the past school year. She remembered the story Owl Moon and the disciplined quiet and listening that we had discussed as a result of this story. Owl Moon laid a basis for study during the school year.

At the outset of my graduate studies, I arrived with the intention of learning better ways of working with children in early literacy. I have gained much more than I ever anticipated. This study of listening has had a profound impact on my life, personally and professionally.

When I began my graduate studies I was fortunate to have been granted a sabbatical. I felt that I needed a change of pace from the classroom, and I was searching for a greater understanding of my profession which would give me a renewed sense of purpose and inspiration. I have found this sense of renewal through the hermeneutic studies that I have undertaken.

The study of hermeneutics is relatively new to the field of educational research. It is a research discipline which is gravely needed in our particular time in history. Yet, it is a complex and difficult discipline within which to proceed. And, the complexity is

also the attraction it holds for helping teachers to listen differently to the rhythms, notes, melodies, rests and silences of the profession.

Listening differently has become central to this research. This listening openness of *Gelassenheit* is a way to counter-act the *narration-sickness* of educational discourse.

Education is suffering from narration-sickness, says Paulo Freire. It speaks out of a story which was once full of enthusiasm, but now shows itself to be incapable of a surprise ending. The nausea of narration-sickness comes from having heard enough, of hearing many variations on a theme but no new theme. A narrative which is sick may claim to speak for all, yet has no aporia, no possibility of meeting a stranger because the text is complete already. (Smith, 1994, p. 180)

Heidegger and Gadamer both teach us the priority of significance in relation to fact, and understanding as more important than knowledge (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 5). Listening for significance and understanding in teaching is part of our awareness of authentic existence. As teachers we live in the everydayness of being; however, the openness of *Gelassenheit* is necessary to understand authentic existence. In the midst of the children and everydayness, we need to listen attentively to and for authentic existence when making pedagogical decisions. In this way gathering places may be possible.

### Gathering Places

Listening to books like Something From Nothing and Owl Moon create gathering places for young and old. Here, in the midst of the

story, we are offered the invitation to listen. *Gelassenheit* comes during the experience of these gathering places and, if allowed, hearkening--a deep sense of understanding--may occur.

In the richness of literature, gathering places become abundant, fertile spots where listening differently fosters the conversation necessary to create *fecund* instances. The old may welcome the fecundity that the young may offer as transformative, not simply additive, and the young may also welcome the wisdom of the old as transformative and not simply additive (Jardine, 1994a, p. 520).

It is here, in these gathering places, where the young may experience curriculum learning as more than the additive one thing after another; it may become harmonious to the children as they begin to understand, through stories which offer gathering places, their learning as a harmonious body of knowledge with a context, a place, a belonging to them and their world, a world of significance and relevance, a quiet place.

### Listening, Caring and Remembering

Listening helps us to remember. It is part of our lengthening of memory that Wendell Berry (1987) speaks of. We must care to listen well. Caring assumes a relation to the world, a finding, a belonging and a living in the midst (Wilde, 1996). Caring leads us to listening differently. It is in listening differently and the realization of caring that mediates our openness to listening, our relationships

with one another, and the possibility of curriculum as a story which remembers being in the world. The search for the good is mediated here, in the listening, the caring, the remembering.

There is also a place for memorization in this form of teaching and learning, in this practice of obedience to truth. To "remember" means literally to re-member the body, to bring the separated parts of the community of truth back together, to reunite the whole. The opposite of re-member is not forget, but dis-member. This is what we do when we forget truth: we are dismembering the relationship between us and the rest of reality, between us and the knowledge we need to take our part in the community of truth. Memory allows us to enter dialogue with other beings who are distant in time and space. As our memory deepens and expands, our network of face-to-face relationships grows richer, more complex. (Palmer, 1993, p. 103)

This re-membering leads us toward the action, the touch, the embodiment of care. In this relationship, we must listen so we become able to carry on for the benefit of the young by invoking a hearkening. In listening, we understand the difficulty of application in hermeneutics.

### The Difficulty of Application

Smith (1994) tells us that hermeneutics requires an openness that is risky and ambiguous. It invites children into the conversation because "one learns to find one's voice only in an environment where speech itself is well understood as having a listening aspect" (Smith, 1994, p. 192). The openness of listening to the young invites this risky deliberate engagement to which Smith refers.

In education, it seems, that because of the fullness of our everyday existence, we are always trying to make things easier, straightforward, replicable and uncomplicated. This is evident in our sometimes prescriptive attitude to teaching methods.

Hermeneutic study helps us to realize that this facility is not as advantageous as we think. But, the alternative to the easy solutions of the present-at-hand is difficult, complex, multi-layered, time-consuming, and worth the listening. We end up in a quiet place which is ultimately much more gratifying and sustaining most of the time. In this way, time may become a "bringer of gifts" (Berry, 1983) instead of something to be gotten through as in the ticking away of the seconds. Time does change things, but our lives as educators may become richer because of time instead of merely burning us out.

Hermeneutics asks us to listen carefully to understand the particularities of the situation at hand. Life, as educators, becomes ultimately more complicated. Yet, it is also slower and quieter too. In this way, hermeneutics is frustrating. We are not able to use the assurance of teaching methods to make blanket rules to adhere to when making decisions. Qualities like tact, phronesis, and correct discipline enact limits that guide the work with children in a careful, listening manner which seeks to act well through understanding well in the midst of the situation at hand. Hermeneutics helps us to create bloom.

### The Story Goes On and On

Tell me a story of the river and the valley and the streams and woodlands and wetlands, of shellfish and finfish. A story of where we are and how we got here and the characters and roles that we play. Tell me a story, a story that will be my story as well as the story of everyone and everything about me, the story that brings us together in a valley community, a story that brings together the human community with every living being in the valley, a story that brings us together under the arc of the great blue sky in the day and the starry heavens at night. . . . (Thomas Berry cited in Suzuki, 1997, p. 207)

These stories and tales, if listened to carefully, make up our collective past, our memories and allow us to move forward into the future with a greater understanding of our connectedness.

In concluding this research, I have a story about a student. Carla was a constant fidgeter and easily distracted. She showed very little engagement in our study of poetry, writing, and spelling; she did not appear to listen well. For most of the year, it was a struggle to include Carla in our small group conversations.

At the end of the school year, Carla came to class one day with a book of poetry written by children. She was moved by this, and asked if she could read three of her favorite poems to the group. We were shocked at this initiative and the enthusiasm she showed when reading the poems.

This event was a sign of Carla's realization that she belonged, that she too was a member of our gathering places. It was a



significant event. She too could be part of the story which we live out. Carla was beginning to listen attentively and open a space for memory.

I experienced a great deal of frustration when I spoke to Carla's teacher about this significant event. Her teacher said, "Oh, I'm sure it just took her five minutes to find those poems." The point was that Carla was ready to take initiative as a student. But her teacher did not understand this significance. And, like this particular teacher, we all live in the realm of sometimes not being open, of not listening, of not taking the time to understand.

When I listen to myself, to my words, to the sound of my voice, I can hear others: I hear others 'inside' myself. Living others, dead others; others near and others far. Conversely, when I listen to others, I can hear myself: I hear myself 'in', or 'through', the others of my world. We resonate and echo one another. I can hear my ancestors: their absence is present, their presence is the presence of an echo, an audible absence. (Levin, 1989, p. 272)

Listening to ourselves and others requires recognizing the spokes as the substance of our history together in education. It also requires recognizing the space between the spokes as important for potentiality and possibility because of its emptiness and its quiet and its richness as a gathering place for old and young. "That like might *already* speak with like without our earnest intervention, needing only our gentle attention, mindful of the ways that whisper within and without" (Jardine, 1993, p. 25) instead of the constant surveillance and methodological strategies of early intervention.

In the service of teachers, children and content, listening has the potential of giving us a renewed understanding of the complexities of pedagogy. Our hope for the future lives in the openness of *Gelassenheit*, the being present of attentive listening and the understanding of hearkening. However, the listening required is arduous, and needs to have the time and commitment of us as teachers.

Our listening needs to learn receptiveness, responsiveness and care. Our listening needs to return to the intertwining of self and other, subject and object; for it is there that the roots of its communicativeness take hold and thrive. (Levin, 1989, p. 223)

Allowing for *Gelassenheit* and hearkening in daily life is extremely demanding (Levin, 1989, p. 225). In considering the difficulty of listening we return to the story Owl Moon. Again, we go along on the journey that the little girl takes with her father. It is a cold and dark winter night. She tells us that to go owling you need to be brave. And, this girl also tells us that as well as being brave, you may go out into the cold searching for the owl and the owl may elude you.

We reached the line  
of pine trees  
black and pointy  
against the sky  
and Pa held up his hand.  
I stopped right where I was  
and waited.

He looked up,  
 as if searching the stars,  
 as if reading a map up there.  
 The moon made his face  
 into a silver mask.  
 Then he called:  
 "*Whoo-whoo-who-who-who-whooooooooo,*"  
 the sound of a Great Horned Owl.  
 "*Whoo-whoo-who-who-who-whooooooooo.*"  
 Again he called out.  
 And then again.  
 After each call  
 he was silent  
 and for a moment we both listened.  
 But there was no answer.  
 Pa shrugged  
 and I shrugged.  
 I was not disappointed.  
 My brothers all said  
 sometimes there's an owl  
 and sometimes there isn't.  
 (Yolen, 1987 p. 7-9)

It is in believing and trying again and again, by searching for the owl, that the finding may occur. I believe that this is the same for pedagogy. It is in the search for the owl, that the quiet place, the space between the spokes, comes forward. It is here where there exists, "a certain room for play" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 242). It is in the quiet place where the play of interpretation may live. And, it is in listening that this *room for play*, with its richness and complexity,

may continue to delight us and frustrate us as we go forward, with hope, into a new millennium together, young and old, as the story goes on and on.

When you go owling  
you don't need words  
or warm  
or anything but hope.  
That's what Pa says.  
The kind of hope  
that flies  
on silent wings  
under a shining  
Owl Moon.  
(Yolen, 1987, p. 29)

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