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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Life and Grief in the Classroom

Finding the Strength in Between

by

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A THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the lifeworld of grief in teaching and learning. Guided by my own story of teaching while living through the process of my mother's dying and my bereavement, I question my knowing about how this might affect the relationships between myself and my students within the classroom. Such understandings moved beyond the boundaries of my own story, into the depth of the lifeworld of the classroom as a student in my school was lost to suicide. Reflecting on how these events affected my life as a teacher as well as the pedagogical space of my classroom, I ask: what are we to do in the midst of pain and suffering in the classroom? I want to understand and explore deeply how grief is dealt within individual and collective lives and how it might manifest itself in the daily life of school.

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I would also like to thank Dr. David Jardine for introducing me to hermeneutics and helping me find my voice in all of this.

Thank you to my family and colleagues who have listened and supported me through this difficult and intense journey. This thesis would not have been possible without you.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, Katherine Kelly, an amazing teacher and friend. She loved me unconditionally, supported me, and believed in me, no matter what path my life took. You taught me so much – I miss you everyday.

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Living in the world as if it were home

But how [do we] understand? Contemplation's attention-in-silence knows by standing alongside, craning toward, dwelling with. Its knowing is poor: it doesn't draw back from its subject bearing the extracted wealth of an essence, a meaning, a moral. Contemplation is the moment when human knowing, lured by the possibility of perfect understanding, is thwarted, shamed, bent back on itself, but continues to know through this shame. Contemplation is knowledge impoverished and embarrassed by that keeps going. This knowing in the midst of the embarrassment of knowledge topples into adoration. Adoration has the completeness for contemplation that judgment has for rational inquiry. Contemplation, unlike the more entrepreneurial noesis of analytic reason, is not interested in the power of knowledge over the thing known, not interested in converting it to utility: marvelling is exactly enough
(Lilburn, 1999, pp. 27-28).

THE INTERRUPTION AN INTRODUCTION

“Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one’s own depth.” (van Manen, 1989, p. 238)

I was first introduced to *Living in the world as if it were home* during my course work for my Masters of Arts degree. This passage confronted me as I continuously felt pressed to ‘make sense of it all’ and come to conclusions about the readings, our experiences as teachers and educators, and about life itself. Having recently experienced a death in my immediate family, I struggled to come to hard and fast conclusions about anything, as I continued to dwell in the moments, the memories, and the questions. Reading this passage, I cried, shouting: ‘yes it is ok to simply dwell in the moments’. To understand does not need to come to “analytic reason” as “marvelling is exactly enough.” I began this journey, marvelling, overwhelmed, and inspired by the strength derived from memories and from the relationships I experienced during the initial few months after my mother’s death. As a teacher I was overwhelmed by the strength I gained from being with my students in the classroom, and the support they unknowingly offered.

How do we survive the feelings of outrage, during those times when we cannot make sense of life? How do we come to peace with grief in a personal and professional level as “knowledge is still thwarted, still stumbling and staring, but now you have the inkling of the shapeliness of your incomprehension?” (Lilburn, 1999, p. 29) Contemplation within the lifeworld of the classroom became energizing and draining, as this way of being became all-encompassing, ultimately complex, and life-altering. It is through this dwelling that I began to observe myself and began the process of writing this thesis. I gave myself over to the existence of the mutual relationship

between the process of grief and professionalism, as well as the state of helplessness that we must endure during our suffering in grief.

Understanding the influences and aspects of grief that we inhabit in our time of dwelling is a fundamental aspect of life within the classroom. Grief is the journey we take as we find new balance in life after loss, meandering down many pathways of emotion, detouring along feelings of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance. Not one of us will travel down this path in the same manner, it is a journey that is intensely personal, and deeply powerful. It is a journey that we travel alone, yet it is punctuated by our relationships and our environment. In school, grief is often dealt with as a “crisis,” in the immediacy after a death or tragedy. However, the community within the classroom continues to dwell within this space, long after the initial crisis has ended, attempting to find our way back to a state of being that may no longer exist or at least will never be the same. We are left to face the ontological questions: What is a life? How do we come to this understanding? How do we embody life, and grief within the classroom? How does the process of healing emerge through remembrance, forgetting, and embodying within the communal space of the classroom?

This journey, these pieces of my life became the narrative of my existence. This phenomenon is a mode of survival that is not just subject or object, but effects and exists as an inheritance. Our interconnectedness revealed itself to me as I navigated the constant changing and evolving commonalities of experience. This writing began as a simple process of observing my life as a teacher and as a daughter as my mother was diagnosed and dying of cancer. This was my interruption. I did not know where this would lead, or who I was to become through the

narrative journey of grief. This is not a process I anticipated, planned for, nor expected. This writing, this thesis, came about as a result of my own life being interrupted. The day my mother was diagnosed with cancer changed everything. It was the beginning of an unanticipated journey that unearthed the need to write, to ponder, question, and reflect. It caused me to wonder how to live in the world. My journey through grief was not a linear process. Grief grew, changed, mutated, expanded, contracted, and tore me apart. Through my tears and anguish the journey helped me put the pieces back together again.

Once these questions began to take hold I began to look around, noticing that I was not the only one living in the world with grief. My students, their parents, and my colleagues also seemed to live in this world as well. I did not set out to write a thesis on this topic, yet the subject matter continued to call me, interrupt me, as I worked through my own grief and the subsequent grief experienced by my students. The more people I spoke with, the more universal this story of loss and grief became. At the time, I was taking a course with Annette Lagrange. We were discussing topics that we could write about, topics that had meaning for each of us as students. Topics that called to us. It was at this time that I could not think of anything else outside of my mother's experiences as she was dying of cancer. I was consumed by this experience, and the emotions and challenges it brought. This topic of grief became a place for me to dwell and contemplate "the tension that exists between the identity of the common object, and the changing situation in which it must be understood" (Gadamer, 2006, p. 308).

It was at this time when Annette gave me "permission" to write about what was really meaningful to me. In reflecting on this experience, I wrote:

The moments within the classroom, those that were most powerful, the most compelling were the most raw and intimate. It seemed that to write about such experiences not only seemed to require academic permission to explore such a personal topic, but it also called for me, required of me to give myself permission to delve into something so emotive, so lived and, so exposed. To explore this phenomenon was to examine my relationship with my colleagues, the students and myself. It was to call witness to the very essence of the lifeworld of the classroom.

And so it began. This thesis then evolved through a continuum of time, exploring the feelings, the rawness, the power, and the passion that came from these experiences. It provided a voice for me during these difficult times, balancing graduate studies, working as a teacher, supporting my family and my children. It provided a voice, a space for my thoughts and understandings to be reflected upon. Attempting to make sense of our selves and our world, our interconnectedness from the micro, to the macro aspects of life, the chapters developed in part as I dwelled and contemplated, attempting to find my place in the world as a teacher and daughter, as I sought to uncover our broader place in the world of education in times of grief. The self-study and reflections as I researched this topic continued as the explorations and understandings deepened through the following two years. Attempting to uncover the deeper meaning of what it means to be in education during times of grief challenged me to be reflective about what I wrote, recorded, and how I engaged in the topic. This experience provided a collection of rich and provocative stories and narratives that were compared with other texts, and evolved into the interpretive work of hermeneutics. It should be noted that during this research and reflection, I was working in a middle school setting, comprising of grades 4 through 9. I have primarily

worked in a middle school and junior high setting throughout my career, and felt that this is the best fit for this self-study in interpretive research. However, I feel these conversations and interactions would be applicable at a variety of educational settings.

Contemplating time, and our understandings of the world around us, became deeply entrenched in my thoughts as I struggled to make sense of loss. This thesis provided a place to find the courage to explore the effects of my own experiences on those around me. The journey continued as I came to witness the tragic loss of a student to suicide. Living with loss within a school was so starkly contrasted to live with loss on a personal level. As a result, I was stuck with conversations I was free to have regarding my own experiences, versus the contrived and limited boxed in conversations I was permitted to have regarding the loss of this student. Struggling to understand the many perspectives and policies which guide this process of institutionalized loss interrupted my understandings of grief, while reminding me of the many students and teachers who are simultaneously dwelling in their own experiences with grief and loss. This thesis provided me with the space to reflect and deliberate over the lifeworld of the classroom.

The freedom to write in this manner felt less contrived for me than so many of our formula essay writings. I have enjoyed the process, and the tears that have gone into writing. It is the first written work that I actually want people to read. I feel this process created the opportunity to discuss difficult aspects of our lives, and reflect on how they make us stronger, and more resilient. It has given me the voice to observe aspects of the classroom that may have previously gone unnoticed. The writing is the method of hermeneutic phenomenology. According to

Gadamer (2006), hermeneutics “is the doctrine of understanding and the art of explaining what one has understood” (p. 361). He suggests that understanding and interpretation are inextricably linked. Hermeneutic research is not about recreating someone else’s meaning, nor is it about affirming one’s own point of view. Rather, understanding is found in a fusion of horizons where one is transformed and in the process, we “do not remain what we were” (Gadamer, 2006, p. 371). This writing has made me look at my self, observe the process, this journey, and the power of life and death, and how it all works together, making us human.

Guided by the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), I began this self-study to research my lived experience of teaching and writing interpretively while living with grief and trauma. Within the context of this research, the methodologies of self-study and hermeneutics were chosen as they are attuned to uncovering meanings and understandings through language, experience, and the experiences of the self in order to further teaching practices (Morck, 2009). The question of truth and understanding intertwined within the experiences of grief in education, challenged me as an educator. Contemplating the spoken and silent aspects of grief within education, the hidden and exposed, part and whole aspects of living in this phenomenon resonated with hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2006). By the end of this research, this self-study had itself become a form of interpretation developed through an understanding of self as teacher, researcher, and daughter, embedded within multiple layers of inquiry.

The first chapter of this thesis, outlines the methodologies of hermeneutics and self-study used in this research. In the second chapter of this thesis, I use *Living in the world as if it were home: Contemplation and Cosmology* to delve in the world of deep contemplation initiated by my teaching while my mother was dying of cancer. This chapter tells the story of how I came to the

topic of grief in the classroom from a deeply personal perspective as the one who is experiencing grief. The process of my mother's diagnosis and treatment of cancer sometimes paralleled my experiences in the classroom, other times it served as a pendulum of opposite forces. The moments within which I dwelled came about through the study of philosophical hermeneutics as I uncovered the phenomenon of life and grief in the world of education. As Gadamer (2006) notes, "The hermeneutic developed here is...an attempt to understand what the human sciences truly are, beyond their methodological self-consciousness, and what connects them with the totality of our experience of world" (p. xxii). In this case, the human sciences show what it might mean to live with grief, and attempt to understand the expression of life and death within educational and pedagogical contexts.

Chapter three continues the discussion of grief within the lifeworld of the classroom, however this time it is centered upon the fatal loss of a student at my school. Although his initial suicide attempt was not successful, the young student succumbed to his injuries 6 months later. The role I played during this time is very different than that which I experienced when my mother died. Making sense of the student's death was a crisis orchestrated through the guidelines of the Calgary Board of Education's Crisis Manual (2009) as well as the student's family who had strong cultural and religious views on death and grief. As a result the freedom to discuss death and the understanding of death and dying was a very different conversation, and was reiterated in a very different manner than that which I had experienced more intimately with my mother's death.

In this comparison between my experiences of my mother's death, relative to that of the student, I continue to uncover and dwell in the world of life and death. Making meaning of all of this is elusive. My "desire to know it in its full particularity will always be frustrated. Contemplation is the mind humbled and sharpened, made keen for love" (Lilburn, 1999, p. 33). This frustration, this meagre attempt for clarity in understanding our world within the context of grief is uncovered here. I come undone when faced with the finality of life and death, but the possibilities of understandings are vast and filled with fury. In chapter four I explore, within the context of my experiences our understandings of space and time and our notions of life and death. It is the moment of confusion and the desire to make meaning of something that I cannot fully understand, contemplate or fully lay bare. It is the path that diverges, that leads many to find answers in religion and spirituality. This is not the place to understand, but a place to dwell. It is the moment of contemplation's observations to be "shy of clarity, and elusive by definition: they come with the loss of the desire to still the world in thought even as the mind continues to crane forward, toppling" (Lilburn, 1999, p. 37).

This is not an exhaustive empirical study of grief within education, but rather an interpretive moment in time, where grief interrupted my life as a teacher, causing me to question, dwell and contemplate our lives and the lifeworld of education as we each journey through life, death, and grief. In chapter five I examine the possibility of transformation and an opportunity for something other than what is to eventuate. The chapter is grounded in the language, practices, policies, and relations that are bureaucratically enacted and labeled as "crises" in educational institutions. I wonder if there are other possibilities and alternatives for how we might encounter and deal with such critical moments in our classrooms and our own lives. The experience of

death and grief is never final, but a meandering of moments which become part of us all. The experience of death and grief are part our bodily experience, determining who we are and who we will become. As Gadamer (2006) notes “essential to experience is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as it’s meaning. As determined through autobiographical or biographical reflection, its meaning remains fused with the whole movement of life and constantly accompanies it. The mode of being of experience is precisely to be so determinative that one is never finished with it” (p. 58).

There is an interesting dynamic between the state of grief within which we as educators live with in the classroom, and the recognition of the relationships that we have with our students. The final chapter of this thesis, the epilogue, discusses the importance of this relationship, and the benefits that could come should this aspect of education be recognized during times of grief, trauma and crisis. Working together with other facets of supports provided by the Calgary Board of Education, we could create a powerful and healing support network for both our educators and our students.

The human experience is subject to a multitude of perspectives and experiences. It is in the experience within which we live, that creates a connection, one that is simultaneously personal and individual while, at the same time, part of a continuous universal story that connects us to one another. Death and grief will be experienced by each of us. Yet we will each navigate these emotions and experiences in our own unique way adhering to the universal truths in our experience. This topic of grief and death is challenging, difficult, and despite being an experience which we all share, it often both silent and silencing. I feel a hermeneutic approach is

most appropriate in the exploration of this topic in asking the question: What does it mean to understand the practice and language of grief in education? This grief and experience with dying is personal; I am connected with it, I live it, yet I wish to reflect and understand the parallels of the personal and universal journey. The individual burden of grief and the mix of approaches deemed appropriate within education to deal with this grief become central. There is no truth as fact in how to proceed, but an experience that is meaningful and profound. This experience is changing and challenging, at once universal and individual.

This is not an external matter of simply adjusting our tools; nor is it even right to say that the partners adapt themselves to one another but, rather, in a successful conversation they both come under the influence of the truth of the object and are thus bound to one another in a new community. To reach an understanding in a dialogue is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we were (Gadamer, 2006, p. 371).

The topic of grief and bereavement within the lifeworld of the classroom needs to be un-covered and un-silenced through a medium which honours the lived experience in each of us. This process has been at once transformative, and continues to remain influx and full of possibilities. A hermeneutic approach orients us in this manner. This interpretive approach enables us to discuss this topic as "a way of being and a way of relating to beings and to being" (Ricoeur, 1998, p. 44). As Heidegger illustrates, hermeneutic inquiry enables us to understand the lived experience as it gives purpose to the phenomenology of the topic. As a teacher, living in grief in my classroom, hermeneutics essentially found me. Reading Heidegger, Gadamer and others who discuss hermeneutics and phenomenology my inquiry fell into practice, it fell into life.

Jardine (1992) explains phenomenology noting that, “in its founding gesture, is a form of inquiry which requires a letting be of things just as they give themselves in our experience, and a profound and meticulous attentiveness and care in attempting to speak, to say, to save this wild integrity of experience” (p. 63).

Our experiences in education come to be through events and relationships which we experience with teachers, students and administration. These relationships, in conjunction with formal practices, pedagogy and curriculum create an intensely personal lived experience. These moments, when interrupted by grief, become a time in our lives that affect our perspectives and understandings of our lives and relationships with others. These experiences are universal in process, yet intensely individual as each of us experiences a different facet within the classroom. It is vital that we recognize this, and attend to this duality of universalism and individual experience in the responsibility we each have in our relationships with one another in education and the effects that this has for each student and teacher. There are policies and procedures that must be followed as a result of guidelines dictated by the Calgary Board of Education, however, there is also the profound individual emotions and perspectives that must be acknowledged, respected, and supported, especially during the challenging experiences and grief and bereavement. By nature, the continued relationship between students and teachers allows for a profound and meaningful connection, a lifeworld that is interpreted in momentous experiences. Considering this practice within interconnected human relationships in education may provide an experience that is both powerful and personal, supporting our unique understanding of our own grief and lifeworld. In this aspect, imagine the possibilities reflecting upon, “a sense of hearkening, an ontological vision, of futurity that care may encompass in the presence of another

human being. It allows others to move into their own potential. Facing our students with heart, being ourselves with them, allows them to be themselves with us, and they strive to reach for the vision that we hold for them” (Wilde, 1996, p. 136).

Immersing myself within the data collected between 2009 and 2011, I entered into the hermeneutic circle in which I studied the lived experience (van-Manen,), and the essence of these experiences (Moustakas) through returning to writing and re-writing, for as Smith (1999) states, good interpretation is “a playing back and forth from the specific and the general, the macro and the micro” (p.30). Interpretive research begins when one is struck by something (Jardine) or when truly interpretive, something addresses us (Gadamer). “Sometimes this address is so strong and powerful that you become a part of it and it a part of you. Gadamer called this authenticity – when you become lost to something such that it changes who you are. You become beholden to its what-ness and that-ness, powerless within its grasp and open to its influence” (Laing, 2013, p.1). Through a series of tragic events, this interruption, this address, changed my understandings of the world, and I delved into self-study and the hermeneutic circle needing to understand, needing to know more. In order to explore these notions, this interruption, I encountered the notion of permission when I revisited my struggle to find the question that was at the heart of my inquiries. In reflexive texts I wrote about seeking permission to write about what was meaningful using one’s own voice and experiences as a teacher.

As initially stated, Van Manen (2007) asserts, “Writing is a kind of self-making or forming. To write is to measure the depth of things, as well to come to a sense of one’s own depth. It tries to

be attentive to both terms of its methodology: it is a *descriptive* (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there is no such things as uninterpreted phenomena”(p. 12). For me, this thesis became something bigger than experiences over time; it became an interruption that called for honesty, honour, many tears, love, and at once an individual story, and a story of many. It became obvious that, though the policies emphasize, in the words of Jardine (2006) “we have been blinded by our culture of fragmentation and isolation,” our experiences with grief and trauma within the lifeworld of the classroom becomes “a way we carry ourselves in the world, the way we come, through experience, to live in a world full of life, full of relations, and obligations and address” (p. 100).

Since entering the hermeneutic circle and undertaking this work as a journey, speaking with others about the phenomenon, and the calling by others to this topic, it continues to evolve. In the beginning, I tentatively spoke of my writing, of my explorations as I felt it made others, and myself uncomfortable. I found many outside of my academic field did not want to explore or discuss the concepts. However as time allowed me to grapple with the topic further, it became well versed – or better versed- I have discovered that the story is universal. It resonates with people. We need to embrace the difficulties, the discomfort and support our voices as we grapple with such difficult topics.

Grief and trauma do not go away, honouring the voices and supporting our students to that they are empowered to find their own way of living with grief, and forming a new relationship with their lifeworld is essential. We need to use the strong relationships we as educators have with

our students, we need to support one another, not just in a compartmentalized method should it disrupt our classroom learning, but so that we are educating students as whole people. I come to suggest that we need to discuss and consider a third space, one which overcomes the limitations we conceive. As Jardine (2006) states, “This gives human experience the character of a journeying (another meaning buried in *Erfahrung*), becoming someone along the way, but never in such a way that suffering is simply overcome or finished, but only in such a way that, perhaps even for a moment, the stronghold of consciousness may be gracefully interrupted ...” (p. 271).

This research has been a journey over time, over emotion, over meaning, helping me to understand a becoming along the way. It is a journey that continues, even as this thesis settles. Should this research continue, I would explore the perspectives and experiences of so many around us. I would broaden the voice of this thesis beyond the scope my observations. As I lived this experience, this phenomenon, so intensely and personally at the time of writing, I could not open myself to that – my trauma and grief filled this space, filled the experience and the journey. Yet as time goes on, I find the relationship and understandings continue to evolve and change. The process of grieving changes us all and makes us more human, more able to love others. That is the nature of a hermeneutic phenomena – it does not conclude, but evolve, change and come to be understood and resolved for now

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER ONE

This research is based on the methodologies of hermeneutic phenomenon and self-study. Due to the nature of this research, it is of utmost importance to consider the impacts of the narrative aspects of lived experiences. Situating this study against the larger picture of these two methods, it will be clear how the mixture of these two approaches can bring out a powerful approach to understanding grief within the context of education.

The modern discipline of hermeneutics has evolved over hundred of years; it is essentially, the art of interpreting. This theory of human understanding has been its progression as a method of understanding through the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Wilhelm Dilthey, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur and Jacques Derrida. The root of hermeneutics goes back much farther, however, as it stems back to Greek mythology.

Hermeneutics has been translated into the English language from the Greek verb *herméneuō*, which means to interpret. In addition to this, the word finds its origin in ...Hermes, the messenger of the gods in Greek mythology. His task was to explain to humans the plans, the decisions and thoughts of the gods. His explanations, his language, his speech, his interpretations, were meant to bridge to the gap between the gods (who spoke) and the human beings (who listened, received, and had to understand). His work, *hermeneuein* (hermeneutics), therefore has something to do with explanation, with speech, with translation, with communicating a message, with interpreting something for people who want to hear and understand. Therefore, the expression “hermeneutics” was coined to

refer to this “art of interpretations” (Smit, 1998, p.275-276).

Hermeneutics is a discipline of interpretation, and the practice of interpretation. It gives space to dwell in the process of consideration as well as those who seek to understand. Heidegger theorized that hermeneutics involved situating meaning of a human in the world, (Laverty), while Gadamer (2006) continued to develop this concept, stating “Language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding occurs in interpreting” (p.389). Van Manen (2007) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as an interpretive methodology and interpretive in its descriptiveness. It is descriptive because “it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves” (van Manen, 2007, p. 180) but it also asserts that all phenomenon is interpreted. The study of hermeneutics “has more the character of conversation than, say of analysis and the trumpeting of truth claims” (Smith, 1999, p.38). Ricoeur (1998) further affirms this aspect of hermeneutic phenomenology when he states, “hermeneutics is the theory and operations of understanding in the relation to the interpretation of texts” (p. 43).

Hermeneutics is a method of coming to understand the human phenomenon through history, language and culture. Hermeneutics endeavours to interrupt the confines of our world-view, calling into question our thinking and challenging us to dwell within. To infer truth within the fundamental misunderstandings of the world and interpretations that are what we perceive, one must first acknowledge that our views of the world are misunderstandings (Schleiermacher). In order to make meaning of these misunderstandings, one must interpret and bring light to an underlying coherence or sense. Schleiermacher continued to develop hermeneutics as he

defined the practice of interpretation in misunderstandings as the beginning of understandings. He was also the first to introduce the concept of the hermeneutic circle, which as Dilthey argued we seek to understand phenomenon as relationships between parts of the whole (Grondin, 1994). Dilthey viewed hermeneutics as a method founded in interpretation that focused on a text in order to understand the original intention of the author (whether in the humanities and social sciences) (Palmer, 1969). Heidegger believed that hermeneutics was not limited to the parameters set out by Dilthey, and sought to extend hermeneutics as a method of interpreting understanding as a mode of being. He teaches us “that all meaning is context-dependent and therefore unstable... From an Heideggarian perspective, culture must not be considered as an activity directed towards the discovery of pre-existing structures and objective meanings, but as a creative process directed towards the exploration of the possibilities opened up by past works” (Sampaio, 1998).

Since hermeneutic phenomenon focuses on the context as well as the whole, we cannot separate ourselves between the subject and object, but view the world from a context-dependent understanding that integrates context and transformed new perspectives. Gadamer continued to develop hermeneutics in conceiving the humanistic notion of *Bildung* or formation from within and “keeping oneself open to what is other – to other, more universal points of view” (Gadamer, 2006, p.15). Gadamer continued to uncover the finite existence of human experience in this phenomenon, and reveal the possibility of new experiences and understandings.

The whole value of hermeneutical experience – like the significance of history for human knowledge in general – seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not

simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us. Understanding, then, does not consist in a technical virtuosity of “understanding” everything written. Rather, it is a genuine experience (Erfahrung) –i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth (Gadamer, 2006, p.483).

Experiences from being, knowledge, text and the lifeworld are opportunities for new understandings. “Gadamer developed an ontology of understanding by insisting on human finiteness and the immersion of human beings in the historic-cultural world. All understanding proceeds from what precedes it...thereby rehabilitating three contested concepts, namely tradition, authority and prejudice” (Roberge, 2011, p.7). The meaning of hermeneutics is understood in both theory and practice of interpretation.

Continuing in this tradition, theorists such as Ricoeur have extended the understanding of hermeneutics the “ ‘infinite’ dimension of human understanding, rather than to its finitude” (Purcell, 2013, p.141). Ricoeur addresses the importance of hermeneutics and interpretation during times of crisis. As interpretation is never complete, never resolved, there is tension in understandings during times of crisis, including times of grief, especially when this trauma is experienced in a public form, guided by policies and rules. Observing the traditions that guide these rules and policies leads us to investigate the community and lifeworld within which they exist.

The norms that are pertinent to this sort of investigation are the rules that already

are in some way institutionalized, if not in formal law, at least in the current everyday practices of intersubjective interaction. What becomes important is to understand why rules and practices that already have certain degree of normative stability in a given community...are not always followed (Marcelo, 2012 p.73-74).

The hermeneutic circle is entered here, as we are part of this system that lives within these policies that guide our actions, and yet, we are also a part of the whole process, especially as educators living with grief in the classroom. Living within the policies as well as within grief evokes a circular pattern of understanding from parts and wholes. Multiple experiences, at once individual and universal, are preserved.

Because there is no absolute, objective table of values, a creative reinvention of existing traditions seems to be, for Ricoeur, the best possible compass to guide us through times of crisis. This is, it could be argued, a pluralism without relativism, whereby each new and creative interpretations of itself and to the dialogue with other values and cultures (Marcelo, 2012, p.73).

Gadamer (2007) states, "Hermeneutics is the doctrine of understanding and the art of explaining what one has understood" (p. 361). He proposes hermeneutic research and interpretations are inextricably connected as it is not about recreating someone else's meaning nor is it about affirming one's own point of view. Rather, understanding is found in a fusion of horizons where one is transformed and in the process we "do not remain what we were" (Gadamer, 2006, p. 375). Maturana and Varela (1992) stated, "the world everyone sees is not the world but a world

which we share with others” (p. 245). The lifeworld we understand, we interpret, comes about through narratives, interpretations, and stories that we use to make sense of the world. “Narrative offer an opportunity to offer an opportunity to explain, to review actions or inactions, to consider what has happened to us, and what we have done to others and perhaps simply to open up something that has been held in. Personal narratives, told to self and other, give meaning to experiences and position life in a historical context” (Morck, 2009, p.16). To further the narrative context to interpretation, “Hermeneutic research demands a self-reflexivity, an ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment, actively constructing interpretations of the experience and questioning how those interpretations came about” (Lavery, 2003, p. 7). This hermeneutic phenomenology supported my research questions about lifeworld and experience as van Manen (2007) states:

The questions themselves and the way one understands the questions are the important starting points, not the method as such. But of course it is true as well that the way in which one articulates certain questions has something to do with the research method that one tends to identify with. So there exists a certain dialectic between question and method (p. 2).

Feldman (2009) states: “when teacher educators research themselves in practice, they rely on their experiences as data and other resources for research” (p. 37).

The experiences within the classroom are not limited, segmented, or disconnected, but are, rather, an interwoven tapestry of life. We must honour this. And so, I embraced an interpretive or hermeneutic methodology congruent with the philosophical orientation of the interpretive research and writing. As Lavery explains, we must recognize that hermeneutics “demands an

ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment, actively constructing interpretations of the experience and questioning how those interpretations came about.”

Hermeneutic phenomenology does not seek to solve, but only to resolve for now. Through its method, I seek to understand even while accepting that I will never fully know the phenomenon I pursue. Each time one considers a part of the whole, each time one enters the hermeneutic circle we deepen our understanding. Cherishing a tentative voice, one that sought permission, despite the ongoing calling and interruption is essential in our understandings within the precarious human and humane world we live in as educators. “Entering into its living questions, living debates, living inheritances,” hermeneutic phenomenology was central to my trying to understand and explore the lived experience of grief and trauma within the classroom.

It is in this practice that the information from and about the lived experiences of a teacher during times of grief and trauma I gathered through course work, online posts, papers written during course work, as well as journal entries, conversations with colleagues, and reflexive texts about the writing experience that I created as a part of this self-study. Through this data collection the negotiation of between self and context was characterized by “the space between self and the practice engaged in” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p.15). Self-study enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of ongoing ways in which to improve my teaching and learning, reflecting and looking back as I develop and grow this research. “Self-study researchers use their experiences

as a resource for their research and ‘problematize their selves in their practice situation’ with the goal of reframing their beliefs and/or practice” (Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009, p. 5).

Self-study came about as a result of wanting to “combine the best of both worlds: the world of scientific research on education and the world of practice” (Korthagen, 1995, p.100). Self-study is defined through separate influences including being defined by our role within the study as role a critical analysis of the self and our involvement and participation within the study as well as within the phenomenon under study (Hamilton, 1998). Secondly, self-study is defined by being situated practice, Samaras explains “I use the words self-study to mean critical examination of one’s actions and the context of those actions in order to achieve a more conscious mode of professional activity” (2002, p.xiii). Thirdly, self-study is defined by purpose in order for teachers to consider “self-knowing, forming, and reforming a professional identity” (Samaras, Hicks & Garvey Berger, 2004). Continuing to evolve and mature, self-study has “been probably the single most significant development ever in the field of teacher education research” (Zeichner, 1999 p.8).

The strengths of self-study research methodology are that it is deeply individual and personal. In education this provides teachers with the opportunity to explore why we teach as we do, and come to understand the influences of policies and programs on our professional practice, as well as the influences we have as educators on those we teach, and how those we teach influence us as educators. In studying these influences, we come to identify the impact and importance of learning from the controls, experiences and policies that affect us (Russell, 2009).

Despite the numerous articles extolling the benefits of self-study in education, there have been a number of critiques. Bullough and Pinnegar outline many of the problematic aspects of self-study in their article. They argue that self-study researchers

may lack significance and quality. Put differently, perhaps the questions asked lack significance and fail to engage reviewer imagination and the questions answered are not found compelling, are purely personal, or are not answered in compelling ways. There is another and more far-reaching possibility: that an adequate grounding and authority for this work have yet to be formed (2001, p.15).

These challenges present themselves in the evolution of self-study, as it continues to define itself from other types of research, as well as its legitimacy as a research methodology.

A number of ways have been suggested to minimize this concern in self-study research as the question of what quality is, is not easy to answer. Feldman (2003) addresses these challenges when he questions our ideals of what makes research valid when he states “although it may be impossible to show that the findings of educational research are true, they ought to be more than believable – we must have good reasons to trust them to be true” (p.26). In order for educational research to be trusted in its findings teachers and our teaching moves towards understandings and change using our research, our narratives, and biographies as a means to represent critical challenges of experiences, research, and a rigorous way forward (Russell, 2009). Ensuring that self-study research is guided by characteristics to make it purposeful and meaningful is essential. It is suggested that during self-study, we consider self-initiated and focused, improvement aimed, interactive as well as considering data collection and representation, as well as establishing

connection, interpretation, honesty, issues involving education and others, as well as research, context, and new perspectives on established truths (LaBoskey, 2004, Feldman, 2003, Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Essentially, self-study “is about researching practice in order to better understand: one’s self, teaching, learning, and the development of knowledge about these” (Loughran, 2004, p.9).

Using these guidelines, self-study research contributes to the professional development in education as it provides the opportunity for progressive improvements in each teacher’s professional practice. Discovering what sustains educators, revealing private understandings and personal reflections could provide deeper insights in education and the phenomenon within which we live. It is in this spirit that I hope to use self-study research to invite us to contemplate the policies through which we conduct ourselves during times of grief in educational settings, as “in the end, questions about what we should be doing in teacher education are moral and political questions that cannot be settled by empirical evidence alone” (Zeichner, 2007, p 38).

AS TEACHER, AS DAUGHTER
A UNIFICATION OF EXISTENCE
CHAPTER TWO

Yesterday I saw 2 wolves. One on the way to the Rockies, one on the way home. The first one was dead. Hit by a car, laying on the side of the road. Lifeless. The second, was running, almost parallel to the car, but heading, slightly, towards the forest.

According to First Nations Medicine, the wolf represents the teacher. He is the pathfinder, the instigator of new ideas, he returns to the clan to teach and share. When wolf appears in your life, you are sharing great truths that the consciousness of humanity will attain new heights. Listen to the teacher within, have the courage, and be willing to expand your views, and gain the gift of wisdom.

And so, I begin to write, engaging in new parameters of understanding, emotions, and reflections. Welcome to my journey, as it takes me from the brinks of emotion through the process of death and dying, and shapes the person and teacher that I will be by the time this thesis is submitted. Be mindful, this is not just my journey, but also the journey of many. As Thomas King notes “through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I’m not the one speaking...I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns” (King, 2003, p. 2). In this writing, I find myself evolving similarly to that described by William Pinar and Madeline Grumet (2004) when they state, “I worked on this problem, then that one...I see that there is a coherence. Not necessarily a logical one, but a lived one, a felt one. The point of coherence is the biography as it is lived...The predominant [question] is: what has been and what is now the nature of my educational experience?” (p. 520). The emerging and developing story of life, death and grief as experienced in my classroom is my lived experience, not in retrospect, but presently. As a teacher and as a daughter I journey together with my students as we share our lives together.

The lived experience of the classroom is forged in our struggle to understand ourselves and each other. For me this lived experience is shaped by life and the phenomenon of death as it impacts my life as a teacher, a daughter and who I am within the classroom.

TO SUGGEST HOW THIS STORY COMES TO CONTROL OUR LIVES

October 2008, ended with the heavy weight of emotions. Halloween night; my children, having lived abroad were out trick or treating for the first time. Upon our return, my mother called. We make distant small talk, as we have been doing for a few weeks now. I did not understand why- until now. Mom has been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. She explains that they have found a mass in her pancreas, they think it is about 4cm, and she going for a CT scan next week to have a better idea of what they are looking at.

BECOMING A STATISTIC

Less than a week later she is in hospital. After undergoing dozens of tests, surgery, scans, ultrasounds, CT scans, conferences, and examined by every doctor and medical student in the ward we are given an affirmative diagnosis; confirmation that the mass is 8 cm, there are nodes on the liver, the bile, and gallbladder ducts. It has also spread to the lymph system. The mass in the liver is too close to the heart to operate on. The mass on her pancreas is too big to operate on. Although she has severe jaundice they bypass this so that her liver may continue to function; or at least not poison her. To alleviate her situation she has decided that really, they will be doing a breast augmentation, and she'll come out of surgery a whole new woman. Her humour and positive attitude are a blessing for us all.

My mother is sent home, being told there is nothing they can do. The doctors suggest that she may wish to discuss palliative options with her family doctor and oncologist. I am frustrated with the way the diagnosis is communicated. How can a person, a loving woman –a teacher-- who has inspired the lives of so many and given so much to others, be sentenced to death on a sheet of paper? Quantified within certain medical parameters, provided with a definitive statement of health, she is sent home. I appreciate honesty; I also appreciate compassion, dignity and respect.

Randy Pausch has written:

Show gratitude
 You can't get there alone
 Let obstacles show your dedication
 Be honest
 Be earnest
 When you do the right thing, good things happen
 Anybody can get chewed out-the secret is to listen to it
 Feedback-cherish it, and use it
 Don't complain, just work harder
 Be good at something; it makes you valuable
 Work hard
 Apologize
 Focus on others
 Find the best in everybody, no matter how long you have to wait for them to show it
 Be prepared – luck is when preparation meets opportunity
 If you live your life the right way, the dreams will come to you – the Karma will find you (2008).

These words I hold dear throughout this month of tears, sadness, and the journey towards acceptance and realization. They provide me with the strength to stay upright, to keep going, and to live life to the fullest. To come in to my class, look at my students with integrity, and do my best to provide them with a love of learning so that they may pursue their passions and become the best that they can be, has become my focus. Alongside my students I find a sense of support and encouragement as they provide me with the strength and love of life, which bolsters

me in my time of pain. It is because of these students and all that they unknowingly give to me that I continue to teach with passion, purpose and enthusiasm, particularly at this very difficult point in my life. Truly being with these students is indistinguishably interconnected with a sense of hopefulness.

Reports of my mother's diagnosis are due within two weeks. It reminds me of the formal educational assessment procedures that require me to place children within the confines of a categorized box. A rubric based on a likert scale is supposed to reflect their progress, and the meaningful learning that has occurred so far. In a concise and effective manner and within the context of a legal and professional document I provide a quantifiable result based on formative and summative assessment. I struggle with this, as it reflects so much of my mother's medical diagnosis practices. Like my mother, this young person in my classroom is to be analysed, categorized and quantified. For what end? How does this reflect who they are, their daily lives, and their character? How does this represent who they truly are as people? Kanu and Glor (2006) illustrate this conflict, "The paradox of teaching in a knowledge society is that while schools and teachers are expected to create the human skills and capacities that enable knowledge economies to survive and succeed, they are also expected to teach the compassion, sense of community, and emotional sympathy that mitigate and counteract the immense problems that knowledge economies create" (p. 102). I know these children. These are the children I discuss ideas with, work with, and laugh with on a daily basis. I teach them, I listen to them, I know them. I know their strengths, their emotional needs and their body language. I know when they are feeling confident, sad, and happy. I know what they are interested in and how they learn. As I refer to my assessments and grade book I continue to battle the lack of

validity that such “effective” reporting holds in the lived experience of the classroom. Completing my reports I attempt to create a more fulsome picture of the whole child within a scale of 1-5. I add three to four sentences per subject, explaining a student’s learning despite knowing that the process, in essence “directs attention away from important aspects of educational programs which are not easily measured” (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2004, p. 736). Within the format of educational subject areas, the quantifiable and measurable aspects of education cause us to lose the interconnected play of life. The lived aspects of education, schooling, of life enacted in the classroom are sorely neglected. As a result, this process feels entirely inadequate, but, paradoxically, I am relieved when it is completed.

The following weekend I fly out to visit my mother for the first time since her diagnosis. I break out in hives. The tension, anticipation, and emotional suppression tear me up inside. Through this visit I make a transition of understanding. Anger, and the feelings of injustice subside and for now, the concept of acceptance comes into focus. The negativities in her life are literally consuming her. She can no longer digest the tragedies in her life, and so the cancer manifests and begins to block the negativity in her life, and eliminate its ingestion. This insight undermines everything; I can do nothing but sob in its truth. To give voice to this awareness brings me to my knees. And so I write:

Dear Mom, I don’t want you to die.
 I’m not ready for this journey yet!
 Not for another 30 years.
 PLEASE
 I can rationalize it, philosophize it
 Try to understand it, I can process it
 But the bottomless well in the pit of my guts cannot accept it
 and won’t have it

It is the child inside me screaming “don’t leave me alone”
It’s the same one voice that says “I can’t”
How do I convince the pit of darkness not to be scared
But to hold onto the memories, the love and the strength
And carry you forward in a new way
In a new journey
But still I cry at the sound of your voice in my soul

Soon after I leave, mom is throwing up bile, and can no longer eat. She is given greater dosages of morphine and is subjected to additional surgical procedures. We find out the cancer is doubling more rapidly than expected.

I stop listening to the news on the way to work. It all seems irrelevant. Every morning, as I look at each of my students, I realize it is these kids that give me strength. It is they who make me get up each day, and find something positive to focus on, amidst the turmoil and grief I am experiencing. It is these kids, each with their own stories who keep me humble, who remind me that we all have our own story, our own lived experiences and narratives that we cherish. In the end it is what we choose to do with those stories and narratives that count.

So everyday, it is this perspective that I strive to focus upon. Each of these students comes to class with their own emotions, trauma, and events that happen outside the classroom. Making the classroom a happy, engaging, enjoyable place to be, where, just for a glimpse of a moment, we can continue to be the students and teacher we want to be is my mantra—it is a deeply intentional way to maintain a positive outlook. The Dalai Lama (2006) has noted “Everyone benefits if we put others before ourselves. I am convinced that steady efforts in this direction will bring about peace and stability in our societies. Since other people need happiness as much as we do...If we try to be kind to others, we ourselves will enjoy happiness, while others benefit

in turn. In the long run, this is how we can contribute to peace and security in society” (p. x). I do not feel as though I am sacrificing anything in this pedagogical perspective. People ask me how I can continue to come to work when the “kids are so draining”. These kids don’t drain me, they energize me! My class, and our experiences as learners remind me that we must all go on; that it is not all about me, even at this crossroads in my life I continue to be inspired to create lessons that are exciting, lessons that we will all enjoy, filled with activity and rich challenges. The journey of discovery in the classroom is where I find joy.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS?

The anxiety begins to build as the pressure to celebrate the holidays comes to the fore. I do not want to celebrate, thank you! The thought of having to decorate my house, and put decorations away again is exhausting. I have booked flights for our family to visit my mom for the holidays. Part of me does not want to go. Apprehension and fear begin to brew in the periphery of my existence.

No, I do not want to come carol singing with the rest of the staff. No, I do not want to decorate the class. As I struggle personally at this level, I can’t help thinking about the 40% of my student who are Muslim and who do not celebrate Christmas. What about those students who do not want to celebrate because of their own experiences of pain and grief? One particular day I have 4 students in tears before the lunch bell has even rung. The pressure of the holidays is getting to all of us. One of my students, while crying, tells me he is worried about the holidays. He doesn’t want to have Christmas without his uncle. Further into the conversation, he tells me that his uncle died in the fall. He committed suicide. I hug my student to console him - it will be

ok I say, you will get through this. As we talk he comes around, and is back to his happy young self. As I leave my class and walk down the hall to heat my lunch I find myself shaking as my two worlds, as teacher and as daughter, collide in their emotional power. As the pressure begins to mount with school-wide activities of celebration I withdraw, and focus on my class and their learning.

Palliative chemotherapy is mentioned as a possible treatment option for my mother. Nothing else can be done. We are told that instead of just targeting one particular region it attacks the cancer everywhere. The miracle of modern science now delivers chemotherapy with no nausea, or hair loss. Once the pain medication no longer works, they shift to block the pain by anesthetising the nerve endings. The doctors tell us that they will focus on keeping her comfortable. Mom is also told not to worry, if she dies of liver cancer, she will just fall asleep and that's it. Hmmm, great?! Palliative chemotherapy is considered, as there are no other options left. As frightening as it is, mom feels it is worth a shot, after all what has she got to lose? How much worse can this all get? Sadly, the answer is, that it can get a whole lot worse.

I try to stay focused on the positives: mom is still alive and we will be together for Christmas for the first time in over 5 years. I remind myself of a quote I once heard, "We don't know it yet, but we are the lucky ones" (Pausch, 2007). I talk to mom every day. We have the opportunity to say everything that we ever needed to say; we have the opportunity to say, "Thank you" and "I love you". These words we cherish, and we never say enough, until it is too late. We have that chance to be grateful.

TOXINS VERSUS SPIRIT

January 2009 brings change, but not in a positive light. Mom begins her round of palliative chemotherapy. The difference between this, and regular chemotherapy is that the patient undergoes treatment once a week, every week, for four weeks, is evaluated, and proceeds continuously with this regiment for up to 12 weeks. And so begins a new phase of this journey.

In week one, mom feels strong, and filled with hope. Maybe this will be her best chance at recovery. This might work. I'm doubtful but I try to accept that this is her choice. I begin to wonder, is this really a choice? After all, how can someone truly choose to accept medication when they are told the side effects, such as hair loss, vomiting, and loss of energy are significantly reduced with this type of chemotherapy? The doctors tell her it could be a remedy to all her ills. What they don't tell her is how much it will destroy her body with toxins, poison, and chemicals that will weaken her to the point where she cannot possibly recover.

In class, I begin to pull things together, numb to the extreme destruction going on in my mother's body, I focus on my students. Back from the holidays I am feeling grateful to be back with them, focusing on making their schooling fun and enjoyable. I want every moment for them to be intentional, purposeful, and captivating. I want to create moments of teaching by getting out of the classroom, and exploring life together in a different and meaningful way. Having real learning experiences, creating villages, measuring the school, developing our learning in a multitude of ways, this is my purpose. Laughing with my students, engaging in those teachable moments, and incidental conversations makes my teaching real and meaningful. In communion with all our challenges, we continue to learn, to be, to share dreams, joy and hope. I am zest-

filled in my teaching. With not a moment to lose, why dwell on the negativities in life? It is this that I focus on, and my enthusiasm boils over, coating us all with desire to learn.

As my mother struggles to fend off death, I focus on life, ensuring that my students make the most of theirs. I have my students cheering at the success of a character during “read aloud,” time, booing when I stop reading to them. Enthralled with books, they ask if they can do extra work, and “take stuff home”. My students are intensely interested in all they are learning. It felt good, and I was so proud of them, for their change in attitude, and openness to new learning adventures in school. This exuberance carried me through my final assessments, and became a refuge to the numbness I felt, arriving home everyday to call my mom—fearful about what I would hear. As the weeks progressed, so did the disintegration of her hope, strength, and sadly, her faith. In just 17 days, my mother had progressed from a hopeful person, who could pretend that she wasn’t sick, and riddled with cancer, to a woman who couldn’t get out of bed, could not eat, and was so tired she was sleeping 22 hours a day. Anger filled me, as the human interventions seemed to be killing my mother off faster than the aggressive form of cancer that she was living with. A deep sadness had settled in, and by the end of the fourth chemotherapy treatment, on my mother’s 58th birthday, I realized that part of her had died already; the part that truly made her who she was. This was the part of her that lived and loved life. This was a woman who could laugh at anything as she found humour and strength in the most absurd places. She had rejoiced in life, giving to others, and being of service. My mother laughed until we cried as we discussed the ridiculousness of making a pros and cons chart of her current situation, to help her make the right decisions. This woman was no longer with us; my mother had become

an anxious, frightened angry woman who was chained to a body that caused her nothing but pain and deterioration. Only helplessness remained.

HOPELESS

The beginning of February begins with the gut wrenching official information that the chemotherapy sessions have done nothing. Absolutely nothing! In fact, the cancer has spread, and there are more signs of it throughout her liver and lymph nodes. No one even mentions the pancreas, or much else. I don't think there was any point. It feels like we are right back at the beginning. Except now we know for sure, not just in our souls, that there is nothing else that can be done. This news destroys my mother even more than the chemotherapy. The sense of hopelessness sets in, and so begins the shaking, depression, sleeplessness, and, I'm sad to say, the reclusion from contact.

In school I struggle to get all my provincial testing done, in preparation for the second term report cards. I watch my class as they become restless and anxious, through our change in focus. We return to being a regular class, filled with tests and evaluations, so that I can document their progress. As I look around, I see that so much of this evaluation neglects to reflect their progress, enthusiasm, and change in attitude about learning. It negates the journey that we have endured, and for some, kills hope of success.

Travelling to visit my mother over the family long weekend, I find my mother has aged 30 years since I last saw her. She is using a walker, after getting dressed for the first time in weeks. The truth, shocking, and stark, ensures that we are honest, and complete during our visit. She is a

prominent figure in her community, to the point that I cannot go to the bank, or order Chinese food, without being given notes to pass onto her with hugs of condolences given to me. As I shy away from these encounters, I am humbled and gracious. A tear filled, loving visit, we share stories, laughs, and I have to opportunity to care for her, as she cared for me as I was growing up. It is in this way, I try to show her my love for her, and all that she has meant to me over the years. I relish the sincerity of our visit. Leaving was difficult, but I left feeling comforted that she knew how much I loved and cared for her.

As I write this paper I continue to try to find my place within this context, questioning, how I identify myself within these events? How can I continue to make meaning within the scope of my life, deepen the level of living, and make every moment meaningful, while continuing to work within the structures provided by this educational institution? Struggling for balance, and looking to find my own voice within this system continues to influence my work as an educator. “The process of self-examination that generates voice is a time consuming task that may not be easily supported or facilitated by the current system of bureaucratization and standardization. Often educators, in moving to gain voice, will encounter others who may attempt to limit their voice...However, an educator who has been awakened through an examination of their own narrative has a profound opportunity to make a difference” (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 113). Moving to find my own voice, empowered by my own students, struggling within my ever-changing understandings of grief, I strive to put my interpretations within the context of the lifeworld in the classroom.

Returning to the classroom, I begin, staggeringly, to seek to recreate the amazement and enthusiasm of a month ago. But how do I capture something that is gone? Something that has died and moved on. Gradually, I find my feet again within the class, and slowly, we get back on our feet. Together, we limp into March.

WHO IS THIS PERSON, AND WHAT DID YOU DO WITH MY MOTHER?

What is the point of all this? It is a question I scream many times. Without the miracle of modern medicine my mother would have been dead last November. But instead, we have had four extra months with her. The question that continuously haunts me is ‘why?’ When this notion first struck, the guilt that came with it was overwhelming. I no longer feel guilty, as I watch my mother’s strength, joy, and energy become further depleted. I no longer feel guilty as the quality of her life is diminished to the point of non-existence; she lives with no hope. I ask why? Why is it that we feel we must fix things, even when they can never be fixed? What is the point of prolonging someone’s life so they can lose all quality, joy, hope, and live in despair, depression and anxiety? I ask why? What is the ultimate purpose of this action – a result of this wretched disease? What is the life lesson that we are to learn from this?

And so, in the context of my class, I begin to raise these questions. Challenging these young people to think about the meaning and quality of their lives I ask: What is your purpose? What do you think the consequences of this will be? What are the implicit meanings? Explain – deepen your thinking! What is your story, how is it that you make your life and your story meaningful? These are heady questions for young people but the students and I trudge along grappling with these demanding questions in relation to social studies, language, math, and writing.

In reflection, I find it interesting that through my own struggle to find meaning and purpose, I bring my students along on this journey. It is within their own lives and individual situations, and their own journey of learning, that such conversations are made meaningful, and interesting to them. I feel such great compassion and care for these young people and want them to deepen their understandings, not just in relation to their schoolwork, but their own lives. Living life with purpose, joy, compassion, healing, integrity, and love, we know “stories [are] medicine, that a story told one way [can] cure, that the same story told another way [can] injure” (King, 2003, p. 92).

In the final days of March, mom is admitted to hospital. She goes under the pretence of respite; though the label doesn't really matter anymore. Respite, extended care, palliative care, either way she has a private room, less visitors, people to care for her, and chances are, she is not returning home. She doesn't want to. This has been a long, hard, drawn out term of care for those in and around her home. She has begun to blackout and collapse more than is discussed. She can no longer walk to the commode without the assistance of two other people; she remains anxious, and depressed. The woman, at the beginning of this journey who was filled with humour, and spirit is gone. Realizing this I come to realize that the part of this person who was my mom is already gone. It is a strange existence to be mourning someone who is still here. She has begun isolating herself, and pushing away those who are close to her. I am shocked, and hurt. This, I think, is not about me, yet ask: who is this really about? This is not the story of death I have been told by others. This is not the process I have been expecting. In her eloquent discussion on the predominant attitudes towards death, Swiss psychiatric doctor Elisabeth

Kubler-Ross states that, “Death in itself is associated with a bad act, a frightening happening, something that in itself calls for retribution and punishment. One is wise to remember these fundamental facts as they are essential in understanding some of the most important, otherwise unintelligible communications of our patients” (Kubler-Ross, 2003, pp. 16-17). We do not discuss death; it makes us uncomfortable as it reminds us of our own mortality. In this silence, we fail to mention the changes that occur within a person, as they journey towards death. We erase the process of denial, anger, depression, and perhaps acceptance that each of us must undergo as part of this inevitable passage (Kubler-Ross, 2003). We journey within each of these stages as individuals, yet we each arrive on the doorstep in our own way as we come face-to-face with death. Yet, when faced with death, I picture the smiling images of the cancer survivors (Canadian Cancer Society, 2011). These images are not the reality I am living. “Through hopes and expectations we have a perspective on life to come, or through desperation and lack of will to live we may have lost such perspective” (Manen, 2007, p. 104). My understandings of the world around me, of life and death are marked by a journey through contrived expectations, tearful closeness, of isolation and rage at the injustice. The smiling, hope filled cancer patient is illusive. This isn’t how you are supposed to die mom, haven’t you read the stories of all the survivors who fought to the very end, who laughed in the face of death, who continued to live in spite of it all? Mom is angry, anxious, and not at peace with dying. She would not make a good storybook character – yet ironically, here she is.

I wonder how I am going to explain to my students the reason I am going to, inevitably, be away. I feel I need to be honest with them, and pay them this respect. They have helped me, and supported me without even knowing. I need to honour them in this way. I don’t want to leave

them in the care of someone else while I am away; I hope I can book the substitute who has previously respected them and enjoyed being with them, just as I do. The irony of this statement shocks me, as I have left the care of mom to others so I can be on this journey with my students. The paradox of the teacher and the daughter are so intertwined. Living deliberately, intentionally, and honestly, I have made the choices I have needed. The duality between that of the teacher and that of the daughter, in reality is not a duality, but a single, unified existence that reflects the balance that I have chosen. It is my students who will give me strength to come home, and go on, while the memories of my mother will carry me through. It is my students who force me to reflect, be purposeful, and filled with intention, while my history with mom provides me with strength, understandings, and compassion. I have needed to do this. It is the students who force me to smile, to laugh, to continue learning, and to strive. It is both who make me love. It is life in the midst of death.

STORIES THAT HELP TO KEEP ME ALIVE

And so ends this first chapter, the beginning of a journey which leads to unexpected places. It is the foundation for the future, for reflection, and for new perspectives. The journey that I take is what I hold dearest, and most meaningful. In teaching and being with students as I lived through the death of my mother, I reflect, cry, love, and laugh. I learn as I journal, linking these understandings to the classroom, I reflect in an autobiographical sense, reflecting upon how living with grief affects the lifeworld of the classroom. Reviewing the impact that our personal lives have on our lives as professionals is an important consideration in the work we do every day with our students in the classroom. This journey of my mother's diagnosis, medical treatments, and soon, death has become "my own unconscious matrix, the mother matter out of

which I have sprung” (Doll, 2004, p. 542). We all are affected by our lives as well as our experiences, and we bring these cultural and personal aspects into the classroom. In the beginning of this story, this journey in my life, fear was holding me back – making me tongue tied, but I see now, for me this telling is a necessary process. It became my voice, my experience, yet the experiences of so many. I am humbled, and live my story with integrity. “One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly – in ourselves. We live stories that either gives our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.” (King, 2003, p. 153).

LIFE-BREATH-HOPE

CHAPTER THREE

Teaching is a profession filled with every human quality: joy, hope, love, despair, confusion, frustration, and bewilderment. As I continue to reflect about my own trauma of grief and dwell in the richness of life with my students, my experience deepens and expands. As educators we dwell within multiple parameters and contexts. Six months after my mother's death, the parameter of grief changed for me as grief manifested itself in a tragic school incident: a student's attempted suicide and ultimate death. As a result, life within a school became affected by alternating notions of grief and normalcy. This experience of loss and pain was disrupted by new understandings that emerged regarding truth and identity within the classroom. The encountered disruption and consequential reflection is the result of my observations of the aftermath of the attempted suicide as I participated and dwelled within this heart-wrenching event. The ensuing cryptic response from the school and the school board was equally wrenching. What are we instructed to say? How do we explain this to the students? Why are we told to silence this event and prevent 'copycat' scenarios? Perpetuating the tensions in life and learning through my reflections and questioning I am confronted with the "triangle of interests and imperatives. This triangle requires teachers to be (a) catalysts of the knowledge society and all its promises of opportunity and prosperity; (b) counterpoints to the threats posed by the knowledge society to community, security, and public good; and (c) casualties of the standardization imposed by the imperatives of knowledge society" (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 118).

In this chapter I reflect upon how a student's attempted suicide affected me, my colleagues, as well as the students in our learning community. While no understanding is ever complete—it is

always subject to multiple interpretation, and vantage points it has allowed me to explore the process of learning within the structures of our identity as a class, as well as that of the wider school community. Reviewing the roles of pedagogy, identity, and embodiment of space I attempt to define and give voice to my teaching practice creating a fluid, living place, and community that is both positive and engaging. Huebner (2004) aptly describes my encounters in the classroom,

The encounter *is*. In it is the essence of life. In it life is revealed and lived. The student is not viewed as an object, an *it*; but as a fellow human being, another subject, a *thou*, who is to be lived with in the fullness of the present moment or the eternal present. From the ethical stance the educator meets the student, not as an embodied role, as a lesser category, but as a fellow human being who demands to be accepted on the basis of fraternity not simply on the basis of equality... the fullness of educational activity, as students encounter each other, the world around them, and the teacher, is all there is. The educational activity is life-and life's meanings are witnessed and lived in the classroom (as quoted in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, pp. 418-419).

Living in the classroom, with the students, engaged fully in life and learning, I strive to engage my students and myself in all facets of life. Guided by their interests, and the Alberta Program of Studies, we recreate and merge moments and memories. The lifeworld of the classroom is a phenomenon that is thoughtful, and generative within the structures of education as well as within us. Aoki (2009) states it is “important for teachers and students as they engage in interpretive acts is to be critically reflective not only of the transformed reality that is theirs to

create, but also of their own selves. It is within this critical turn, a precious moment in praxis, that there exist possibilities for empowerment that can nourish transformation of the self and the curriculum reality” (p. 121). Like the journey in grief, life, and learning within the lifeworld of the classroom is both individual and universal. Aoki (2009) adds that the importance of this transformation, “it is this critical turn that provides the power to affirm what is good in the reality experiences, to negate what is distorting therein, and to allow engagement in acts of reconstruction guided by an emancipatory interest” (p. 121). The strength our class had together as students and teachers navigated during my own journey in grief and bereavement was powerful and profound. However, in other circumstances, this journey is silenced and rigid when it is dictated by policies and public sphere that subvert these relationships.

AND SO WE BEGIN-EXPERIENCES

Blank...the page is blank, like life, like breath, like opportunity. Somehow we must find our way to our voice, and back again, to make sense of the page, to make sense of life. In order to create, we draw from our most inner well. But what if the inner well is damp, dark, and rather obsolete; then what? Does the blank page still matter, what does it all come down to in the end?

-(Thoughts written by Michaela Mistal pertaining to a student’s suicide, Spring 2010)

In the words above I try to imagine the thoughts, feelings, despondency, and the rationalization of emotions of a 14-year-old boy who attempted to kill himself. A boy, a child, who has brought himself to this place, this moment to touch more lives than he will ever know – like the ripple of a raindrop reaching its fingers to every side of an ocean. A boy so numb, so sad, so withdrawn, that he is able to cut so deeply. This is not a cry for help. This is the real thing. But it is interrupted. The police and ambulance arrive to rescue this young man, a boy, a child, from the depths of despair. And now the boy is in hospital, connected to every tube and machine

imaginable. Connected to a respirator, forcing him to breathe, to take in air, while his deadened limbs rot. The life support machines continue this anguish, one that began long before the knife blade cut, while gangrene eats away where the knife once was, and H1N1 attacks his lungs. In the staff room we find ourselves in a state of waiting, breathless for the inevitable. In a state of limbo and helplessness we wonder is it inevitable? A state of confusion reigns while we wait. Some of us continue on, pretending that life contains some degree of normalcy. However, in our own ways, we all wait. Each of us in a state of suspended belief that this never really happened, that this blank page can be rewritten for us with a happy ending that makes sense. A story where we are not so helpless and hopeless. We continue about our day, acting, for the other students as though things are fine. There is nothing to say, about why we are all emotionally raw, about the whispers of emptiness that pass as two teachers cross paths. Nothing, but a blank page. Tears, silence, anger, and frustration slip into our conversations betrayed by bleakness and vulnerability. The life with this child that each of us shared (directly and indirectly) affects all of us, more viscerally on an individual level depending on our relationship to this young boy. Our ability to reflect on these feelings, our efforts to make sense of this tragedy lives with us, following us like the enveloping fog.

Returning to my class one day, I laugh at the irony of the book I chose several weeks back. *Tuck Everlasting* is a fantastic novel that has introduced numerous philosophical questions into the minds of these lovely children. Today we explore the notion of everlasting life. We ponder the question “If you could drink a potion and be 10 forever, would you do it?” I watch the class come alive as I sit back and listen to each of their explanations for their choices in this matter. I sit back and watch, amused by the irony, haunted by it, as another member of their school

community responded violently with a different voice. I struggle to silence my thoughts; I focus on the class and their well-argued points. Settling back down, we record our arguments. I take a moment to breathe.

Days go by and I find myself checking in with my teaching colleagues, making an effort to talk with each of them about how they are coping. I realize now, I am doing my best to get a sense of how everyone else is doing, making sure everyone is all right. Sitting, pondering this situation, this life existing within the walls of the school, I realize I am uncomfortable with powerlessness. I must find a way to support others, to make them feel comforted. I know I can't fix it, but each little act of compassion helps. I begin to reflect, to wonder, what each of us makes of this state of being, of our own feelings of helplessness. How do we put these ideas, these supports, into action?

In observing the phenomenon of grief and death and its place in the lifeworld of the classroom and the school, I find myself engrossed with the care of others as they experience a flurry of emotions. Yet in this realization I begin to wonder, is this really what is going on, or is this a reflection of my own understandings and experiences of grief that are so recent and so personal. Although I link, connect, observe, and reflect with others, I question my interpretations, my experience, and myself. Can I ever fully be objective in this dialogue on life – this discourse of grief, death, life, and all that goes with it? Should I be objective, or embrace the ambiguity of emotion? Reflecting on my experiences and reflections during the writing of this thesis it has become apparent that I cannot divorce myself from my own understandings, observations, assumptions, and judgment. It is inevitable that this phenomenon presents innate difficulties.

And so I find myself stuck. I do not know what to make of this situation within my school, nor within the experience of grief and death. We mimic a semblance of order, a juggling of life, but I question and oscillate between disillusionment and reflection. I do not understand the culture of denial and dishonesty that is present in schools and society, undermining all that we do. I do not understand the impact and consistent presence that this act has on my students, my colleagues, and me. I do not understand this phenomenon, I feel feeble and mystified. I ponder, I question, I doubt. Throughout my observations, the life of the classroom continues, students' learn and grow; life seems to go on. Change, transformation, tragedy are not foreign to children lives; they are moved to foster care, they change schools, experience complex family relations, move, and die, all the while the wheel of time keeps ticking. The life of the school continues — the hallways are still full; the voices and laughter of children still echo down the hallways. I continue to question, to reflect, and to ponder the paradox of life. I find myself deliberating the very essence of life, its meaning, and purpose.

So I face the difficult question, why does this matter? Is 'it' all that important? (However 'it' is defined for you). As I face these questions I settle down to write report cards. This time is different from the challenges I faced while my mother was dying. I feel good about writing these bits of assessment. Perhaps it is the freedom that I have secured in my new place of work, or the extra effort I have made to deliberately demonstrate that yes, I do know your child, I see them everyday. I speak with them, get to know them, and try to help them not only acquire the knowledge that has been deemed valuable for them to know, but I help them to become the best that they can be. I am trying. I am doing my best to value the life that is within my classroom. I am injecting life into my students, challenging them, engaging them as best I can, in a fervour, to

ward off the starvation and isolation that is created by loneliness. I am writing my report cards passionately so that each of my students knows that I care and that I want them to do well. I want them to succeed. Yet in the end, in the silence, I know that I am doing all of this because of the scariest thought of all: it could be one of my own students, a few years from now repeating the act of the young boy for whom the world was nothing but a blank page.

THEMATIC REFLECTION AND INTERPRETATION

Through the emotions and observations that have resulted from this young boy's attempted suicide I have come to realize that in reality, all we can tell is our own truth. I will never know what happened, or what drove a boy to such tragic circumstances. I will never know how to fix it. I will never know what is the right thing to do. Nor can I; all human beings are interpreters.

But there are other important issues of life which we can only resolve through this kind of insight; for instance, why it matters and what it means to have a more deeply resonant human environment and, even more, to have affiliations with some depth in time and commitment. There are questions which we can only clarify by exploring the human predicament, the way we are set in nature and among others, as a locus of moral sources...we need new languages of personal resonance to make crucial human goods alive for us again (Taylor, 1989, p. 513).

This language of personal resonance, this question of human environment is what should be cultivated in schools. This is the hidden curriculum of life behind the learning outcomes and achievement tests. We nourish and develop life, the essence of how we dwell within the class (Chambers, 2008). This is the place where I can control what this essence will be. It is the place I can dwell, along with my students, creating a space within the classroom which reflects

the ideals and environment to nurture all of us. As Greene, notes to make this possible we need “the ability to be reflective about what...[we are] doing... be brave enough to incorporate... past into the present, to link the present to a future” (Greene, 2009, p. 161). I think and dwell upon the life of the classroom, the students, teachers, and the school, we all inhabit together. In contemplation, I ask myself, what is each of our relationship or connection to this grief, this tragedy, the utter rawness of this experience in which we dwell not only in our time and place, but in this situation where we live, teach, and learn? Kubler-Ross argues, “Our only purpose in life is growth. There are no accidents” (Kubler-Ross, 1997, p. 289). If this is the case, then where is our growth, and why did this accident occur? This is a question that far surpasses the scope of imagination, however, in honouring this boy’s plight, in considering the effects, and the pause for thought that it has provided me, I find myself confused and humbled by this boy’s strife. Although I am helpless to support him, perhaps I can support others. Through this realization I come to more deeply understand the term honour.

Conversely, I continue to struggle with the bigger question: How can the life within the classroom, the essence that is so vital to myself and my students be revisited, respected, and represented within the hierarchical and formal structures of the elementary curriculum? Keller (2002) answers this by simply stating: “Within a supportive and loving community we learn mutuality, and learn to hold one another accountable to this mutuality. Enriching one another through the sharing of our existences becomes a communal discipline” (p. 276). The supportive and loving community are not the result of the curriculum, but foster the learning and acquisition of knowledge within the curriculum. Without this communal discipline, there is no learning, there is no hope, and there is no sense of identity, no connection. Perhaps, this is in part where it

goes wrong, but these are not ‘problems’ that can be easily ‘solved’. In speculating about the boy’s circumstances perhaps love and support were missing, a loss of connection, in which life no longer lived in one or more aspects of the boy’s life. Losing hope, he became helpless, hopeless. I cannot imagine all that was happening within his own life, within his own perceptions, but this may be a place to begin, to understand, and ultimately displace hopelessness. Perhaps this is where I might seek my own answers, a purge of some of the helplessness I feel. I endeavour to support and love others and prevent this atrocity from occurring once more. I can only try to understand, even after the fact, to rid the silence that perpetuates the denial and hopelessness “Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and fleeing from it” (Freire, 2009, p. 149). And so I continue to bring life into my class, building relationships, caring, listening, laughing, and sharing ideas. I agree with Vanier that people need a friend, a teacher, someone who might help us make sense of our lives ourselves and find a sense of purpose. Children cannot live and grow humanly without love. They need to feel connected with those around them. Without this – life is no longer (Vanier, 2008). I continue to teach.

Finding my voice within this blank page has been a tremendous journey. As I journey through understanding how the attempted suicide of a student has affected me as a person, and as a teacher, many questions have been raised but few answers provided. Trying to make sense out of this event has been difficult, yet finding answers that work for me within this context provides hope. Hope and fear, community and isolation, as well as helplessness, have generated an emotional context for this journey. I have come to realize that through hermeneutic reflection “it seems necessary to establish a community, one critical yet supportive” (Doll Jr., 2004, p. 273).

The hidden curriculum and the essence of the classroom is the element with which, as a teacher I have control. I create the atmosphere within my class; I create the sense of possibilities, of questions, of support, and of love. It is through this means that I am able to continue to feel I can make a difference. Perhaps not within the life of our poor student who lies in hospital, but more broadly preventing those of my students who may have begun to feel the same state of disconnect. For “If children have been listened to and helped to make their own decision, to accept and respect others, and to be open to them, if they have been taught to live the to-and-from of life with others, these children will later on be able to live other forms of belonging and grow to maturity with greater ease” (Vanier, 2008, p. 43). It is Vanier’s words that fill my blank page, and provide a voice, a purpose, and a renewed optimism. It is these words – for these children in my classroom each year – that I teach.

**THE RELATIVE BEGINNING TO
AN UNDERSTANDING OF LIFE AND DEATH
CHAPTER FOUR**

In living with the grief, both on a professional level, as well as a personal level, I have come to question many things. I question life, death, and this bizarre journey of mine called grief. Yet beyond this is a questioning of every understanding that we assume to be true, we assume to be real; I question time. In this chapter I explore our understanding of each moment. I intertwine notions of life, death, and the journey of grief, situated in concepts of space, time and the experiences of the moment. I draw on psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross clinical stages of grief, I do not use these as a definitive process, but as a basis to develop my own concept of grief and bereavement to illustrate how this is a shared but uniquely individual process. I continue to explore the experience of grief as understood through a process of grieving, not by stages, but by a way of recreating the relationship one has with the deceased. This is important when considering both the universal and individual journey one lives.

Neither stage/phase nor medical grief theories provide descriptively adequate general understanding of grieving they oversimplify complex experiences, they imply that there is a definitive end to grieving, and medical models mischaracterize normal grieving as pathological. Neither type of theory respects the individuality of the bereaved they urge that griever are far more alike and predictable than they are, they misapply statistical generalizations to individual griever, and they often lead adherents to impose inappropriate expectations upon griever. Stage/ phase and medical thinking also reinforce helplessness they imply that grieving is something more that happens after loss and grief reaction, and they ignore how grieving is an active and choice-filled response to both. Neither

type of theory provides useful guidance for caregivers: They imply that caregiving means either simply waiting with, comforting, and listening or treating symptoms, sometimes even paternalistically (Attig 2004, 346-347).

Having journeyed through this experience there is inexplicably a randomness, and chaos that seems to lead to a pattern that is recognizable. Perhaps it is this chaos that brings us to the most important aspect of life itself – relationships. These relationships form the connection that is present within our family life, educational experiences, and social encounters with others. This network of relationships will be explored as they form — within the life of the classroom — virtually every moment. The journey of living in life and grief that is illustrated by the internal energies of the self, our agency, and our intentions in the world. These energies and their reflective nature, along with the external influences of life are combined within the moment of the present, and the network of our experiences. Being open to a broader perspective of the importance of these influences upon ourselves deepens our personal understandings of our lives, allowing us to dwell deeply in our every moment, changing, evolving, and learning through our interconnected networks.

Interwoven within the course of life comes death. The loss of life is an aspect of existence that we cannot divorce from ourselves. It is rooted in who we are, and who we will become. Those that came before us developed the roots of our growth, of our being, moulding us into what we are within this moment. Understanding the intricacies of this dualistic relationship of life and death is profound, and calls much into question. My own journey with grief, has led me to

interruption, pause, and complexity, they cause me to pause and dwell, to be open to other ways of being, and of understanding.

SPACE, TIME, MOMENTS AND METAPHORS

As I trudge through loss, I recognize the dubious gifts it offers: sadness, loneliness, and isolation. I see my reflection changing, as the years of gut-wrenching sadness take hold in moments. I recognize the thoughts, and the moments of introspection that arise as a result of my isolated confusion. I feel the words pummel their way out of my mind in whatever means they can find, needing to escape, to find solace, to find company in the metaphor of being. And yet, I wonder how this journey all plays out. What is real, what is imagined, how does this all affect the lifeworld? "Metaphor does not tell the truth. All poets are liars: the river is a sleep and a grazing; it is dragon muscle; it is shut-mouthed eloquence" (Lilburn, 1999, p. 80). In this time of silence, where the trees are screaming, I wonder when the canyon of sadness will stop chiselling itself into my being. I wonder, is it possible for this to not quite be the whole story? My understanding of life and death has deepened. I have come to understand that there is no singular beginning or end. These understandings are not linear, but moments of an interwoven tapestry that we come to know as the present.

The present, the mere understanding of what the *present* is has been called into question through my process of understanding life and death. Perhaps the present is merely a metaphor for our current understanding. The present is only in relation to where we are, both in space and time. Perhaps this perception is limited by our language and its influences on our understandings, "restricted to the study of phenomena that could be measured and quantified" (Capra, 1996, p.

19). Our understandings of time and space are based on an assumption that this journey is linear, and proceed in a logical, consequential manner. It is understood as a singular, simplified understanding of existence. "As we relearn our worlds, we reorient ourselves within lived space and lived time. We do not experience space as a three-dimensional geometrical coordinate system or as a container that is objectively given and filled with physical objects and other persons" (Attig, 2011, p. 118). As we relearn our space and place in the world we reorient ourselves within our history, our present and our future. When calling into question our understandings of time and space, as Einstein did, it illustrates that space and time is skewed based on relativity, and we discover a more complex understanding of existence; one that calls into question our understandings of life and death (Einstein, 2006).

The wealth of possibilities for *now* are endless. Our experiences in our lifeworld are relative to our understandings of past and future. It is within this that we may define *now*. This understanding of presence has enabled us to describe time as a linear process. "In this view, time proceeds inexorably from past to future; it is irreversible" (Falk, 2009, p. 94). The flow of time is a continuum that is explained in relation to the moment in time within which we dwell. However, "as Einstein believed, [the] reality embraces past, present, and future *equally* and that the flow we envision [brings] one section to light as another goes dark is illusory" (Greene, 2004, p. 132). This implies that should we experience past, present, and future within a simultaneous moment, then time is not necessarily linear, but only appears to be so due to its relationship with other moments. "This feeling, this sensation that time is flowing doesn't require previous moments – previous frames – to be 'sequentially illuminated'" (Greene, 2004, p. 140). Each moment is. It is not a passing of time, it is not measured into units, it just is.

Our understanding of life and death, at present, is explained in the measure of linear time. It can be measured and quantified by one's birth and death dates. However, if we regard our understanding of life and death in our moments as a shared space and time, the following investigation ensues: should we call to query our understanding of time, as perhaps not linear, then do we re-examine our understandings of life and death; do we call into question our systematic understanding of living systems and relationships? Relationships are a complicated, multifaceted process. The relationships of life intertwine between and among people, our experiences, our understanding of space, time and life. Relationships are embodied, and intuitive and often beyond narration, as the depth of experience is the strong tie that binds people together. Mere words cannot sufficiently express the depth of feeling realized through our most intimate relationships. "Ultimately – as quantum physics showed so dramatically – there are no parts at all. What we call a part is merely a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships... We realize that the objects themselves are networks of relationships, embedded in larger networks" (Capra, 1996, p. 37). Dainin Katagiri (2008) further explores this notion when he notes,

We understand existence as something opposed to space. But that is dualistic thinking. If everything exists together simultaneously in a moment, then everything can't occupy a portion of space, everything must occupy the whole of space...In the realm of space as being, all sentient beings exist, but they are not separate; they are dynamically interconnected and interpenetrated in peace and harmony" (p. 74).

The system of interconnectedness explains the importance of our relationships with one another. This structure of importance within our understanding of space, time and the interactions that we

have on a daily basis influence our dealings with all of our emotions, experiences, and views. Since the universe does not have a universal *now*, only the objects that change define time. Such understandings frame our current conceptions of our state of being, life, and finality.

Within the concept of space, time, and the network of relationships and energy that is shared between all sentient beings, I find it peculiar that so many of our emotional journeys feel as though they are conducted in isolation. And yet, working through loss and the process of grief is a passage that is undertaken in profound silence. This silence is both debilitating and empowering. It is comforting at times to be with the memories, and to dwell in the silence of infinite time. The memories stay with us forever, yet how we live with them is individual as the relationship shared between two people is unique; it is this aspect that also makes for a very isolating experience when one is left behind. There is a simultaneous confusion and understanding between people who have and are experiencing grief. Loss invokes a personal sense of isolation, of bewilderment, and raises many questions we ask of the universe. It is like being trapped in a well, cold, damp, dark, and alone; as we begin to claw our way out of this well, we find that others have been with us all along, we just couldn't see them. Once we do, however, there is a shared experience and bond. Encountering the other in a dialogic and sympathetic experience envelops me and enables me to dwell within the grief. The process in which I am engaged, screams to be explored, understood, and expressed. Consequently, I endeavour to make sense of life, death, grief, and relationships that continue to be forged through these experiences.

LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND GRIEF

There are many theories regarding the emotional response to grief, most often they are broken into stages of grief that people are said to traverse. Psychologists such as Kubler-Ross (2003), Lindemann (1944), Parker and Weiss (1983) believe that a series of predictable stages must be endured during the process of grief. Despite this stepped orderliness, such programs can be a chaotic rollercoaster for the individual. Engaging in the various stages (with the requisite responses and attitudes that they forge) of recovery of grief and death and dying, can feel very isolating. I pause to wonder, how is it that we all journey along the same path of grief? “No study has ever established that stages of grief actually exist, and what are defined as such can’t be called stages. Grief is the normal and natural emotional response to loss...No matter how much people want to create simple, bullet-point guidelines for the human emotions of grief, there are no stages of grief that fit any two people or relationships” (Shermer, 2008). The stages of grief and the journey of death and dying have evolved since their inception, to the point that we understand grief in a different manner, as a re-establishing, or reinventing the relationship we have with the deceased. Yet there is also a continuum within this journey; a continuum within ourselves, and one that we find within each other. Perhaps it is our perspective that has evolved; perhaps it is the journey of grief that is as individual as our lives, linking it to relationships, connections, and yet isolating at the same time.

Grief is hard work. It is challenging, difficult, surprising, and humbling. It is individualistic. “Grief is a complex process with diverse consequences” (O’Brien & McGuckin, 2013, p. 6). Every person processes grief in a different way, at different times, within different cultural references and contexts. And yet the process must be endured, "So the mourner has little choice.

She must address her loss" (Ashenburg, 2009, p. 121). Elisabeth Kubler-Ross has described some of the most prevalent grief programs, seeing them as frameworks that enable us to deal with loss. These consist of: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005). A plethora of variation of these stages exists in the field of grief, as do many debates as to whether these five stages are valid and finite. As I write this I want to remove myself from this process. The stages do not work for me, though I understand, within this process, how we wish to make sense of it all, categorize it, make it predetermined, and predictable. Grief does not act in this manner. These stages are a place to begin, however, grieving is not orderly, concise, or nicely tucked away. This process is messy, personal, and there is no typical way to endure this duality of a universal and individual journey. As stage theory continues to be prevalent within literature, on-line, and in many self-help resources, I briefly outline the stages mentioned above. However, it is important to recognize current understandings of grief and grieving as a continuing, limitless relationship that is developed with the deceased. This important, and continuing understanding is discussed in the following section.

Denial on the part of the person who is grieving often comes in the form of waiting, an expected phone call that gets delayed, a moment of sharing. Not being able to fully process the depth of the loss may help us to survive the actual loss. In a way it allows us to pick ourselves up, and continue with life. To be conscious of this orchestration of moving along in life brings about a level of acceptance, but only "if we are willing to take an honest look at ourselves, it can help us in our own growth and maturity" (Kubler-Ross, 2003, p. 61). Coping with the immediacies of

life, once we are able to pick ourselves up and feel something again, we allow ourselves moments of anger.

Following denial, anger, and bargaining, conflicting aspects of our grieving cycle come into play. Anger is a very real aspect of grief. It manifests itself through anger at the doctors, at ourselves, at the world, and even at the person who died. It is often confusing to feel such a powerful negative emotion that is not sadness, however it also reaffirms to us that we can feel and love. We have lost someone who was a part of our world. Bargaining then voices itself in the 'if only/what if...' questions. If only we could change that one decision, what if she didn't live this way or that...the cycles of questions are endless. Bargaining can often emerge between appeals to changing the past in order to change the future from regret and guilt from decisions in the past, to decisions to be made in order to see that person once again (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 17).

In reflecting upon the past and the future, our attention comes to the present. This moment, in which we dwell, the moment in which the strongest sense of emptiness resides, is the moment within which we can make most of our understandings. The person who we have lost is not here. The emptiness that this brings leads us to dwell deeply in the sadness. This sadness is like a bottomless well of darkness. Perhaps this is where our sense of loneliness in our journey is discovered. This depression can be boundless, unyielding, and solitary. The hope is knowing that "in grief, depression is a way for nature to keep us protected by shutting down the nervous system so that we can adapt to something we feel we cannot handle" (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 21). However, in this depression, we often do not wish to dwell. It is hard. It is lonely.

And we dwell in a society that feels it needs to fix sadness, especially when it feels like it is going to go on forever.

Finally, the journey loops to acceptance. This acceptance is a moment in the process that we experience. It is not the final destination, as we continue to find ourselves in the journey of grief once again, at any point, at any time. But acceptance is present, in moments, as we learn that it is our time to heal. "We must try to live now in a world where our loved one is missing" (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 25). We develop a new relationship with ourselves and with our person whom we have lost. Perhaps this is where our journey begins, where a new understanding of life and death greet us, allowing us to dance through the moments of our lives. It is where we look around and feel the gift that has been bestowed upon us. We are able to appreciate what this journey has brought us so far. That, at least, is how I have come to view my moments of acceptance, prior to the rollercoaster of grief plummeting again.

I come to question myself about my understandings of the stages of grief. During the immediacy of the moment I hold onto the stages as outlined by Kubler-Ross and others. It is what I know from previous work in grief, and what I have come to understand. In this phenomenon, "we many be tempted to an understanding that suffering loss and grieving is universal – that suffering as grieving is an experience common to us all, one that is inevitable, given our nature as sentient human beings. But such a universalistic understanding...clings to the traditional Western modernist belief in 'the objectivity of identity, and in the reality of essence or universals'" (Aoki, 2009, p. 409). Despite this, I cling to the successive ordering of these various categories as I journey in grief. Years later I realized the

stage theories have a certain seductive appeal – they bring a sense of conceptual order to a complex process and offer the emotional promised land of 'recovery' and 'closure'. However they are incapable of capturing the complexity, diversity and idiosyncratic quality of the grieving experience. Stage models do not address the multiplicity of physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs experienced by the bereaved, their families and intimate networks. Since the birth of these theories, the notion of stages of grief has become deeply ingrained in our cultural and professional beliefs about loss (Hall, 2011).

When living within each moment, each present, I understand it as a present within loss, in relation to the past without this type of loss. “Within grief, there are aspects of intense sadness, but intense sadness over loss can end, yet grief remains and is experienced again and again over time. In many ways, one could argue that loss becomes a part of our biological structure in the shape of grief” (Moules, 2004, p. 100). Grief continues to develop and evolve as we live within this context. “Phenomenological analysis of this emotional reaction reveals that it is a complex of a belief, disposition, and feeling. In grief reaction, we believe that we have lost someone valuable. We still harbour within ourselves deeply engrained dispositions to feel, act, think, expect, and hope in continuing life as if we have not lost the one who has died” (Attig, 2004, p. 344). A fragile understanding within the structure of non-linear time, there is no beginning, and there is no end, resulting in a shift in understanding of this journey in life and grief. “Grief is the most universal of human experiences; it is also one of the least understood” (Moules, 2008, p. 63). Living with grief is not something that is completed through a series of stages as described by Kubler-Ross. “Stage models, although they many contain some heuristic value, obscure unique experiences and narrowly focus on psychological responses ... Stages imply that grieving

occurs passively in expected sequences that disregard individuality and fail to resonate with personal experiences” (Moules, 1998, p. 144). The journey with grief will never truly end, merely shift and change within the ebb and flow of the moment that make up the sensation of the passage of time. “Because our lives are woven together with the lives of those we care about and love and we cannot change the event when one of them dies, bereavement challenges us to take constructive action in response” (Attig, 2004, p. 343).

If our perspective has evolved to a point where we can understand that life is truly never over, (so therefore nor really beginning), but is a collection of moments that we may embrace, learn from, and use as a point of wisdom in other moments in our lives, then perhaps this is where the importance lies. Our relationships are defined by our being, in death, and in grief, as we re-establish a new relationship with the deceased. “Shifts in our understandings of grief not as saying goodbye but continuing in relationship are beginning to emerge in literature and are shaping new understandings of grief and models of practice” (Moules, Simonson, Prins, Angus, and Bell, 2004, p. 102). It will depend upon your values, understandings, and mental meanderings. This understanding may not affect my everyday moments in life, but it does alter the perspective of my relationship with life, grief, and the places in between.

Grieving is not simply physical labour, including effort to meet basic survival needs for food, shelter, and closeness with others. Nor is it merely emotional expression and adjustment. Nor is it entirely psycho-dynamic accommodation, including revival of self-esteem and self-confidence and modification of identity. Nor is it simply meaning reconstruction, including cognitive adjustment and spiritual accommodation. Nor is it merely behavioural modification, including

adjusting desires, motivations, habits, and life patterns to new reality. Nor is it entirely family or community adjustment to loss, reassignment of roles, and shared meaning-making. Rather, grieving is each of these things all at once. It is misleading to characterize the work of grieving as if we ordinarily do any of these things in splendid isolation from the others. They are seamlessly interwoven into the fabric of our lives as dimensions of the whole persons we are. As we come to terms with loss through grieving response, we strive to accomplish three things: (a) to transcend and find meaning in our suffering, (b) to make ourselves at home once again in the local and global contexts of our lives, and (c) to stretch into the inevitably new shape of our daily lives and new course of our life stories (Attig, 2004, pp. 347-348).

Should we each have our own notion of *now*, could this mean that we create our own state of life, our own interwoven moment of time? Time is a construct of the mind, or a mistake that the mind makes in order to explain and rationalize our understandings of the world. If it is indeed a construct of our own consciousness, does it always occur consistently? If time moves equally in the past, present, and future, what could this mean for our own understandings of life beginning at birth, and ending at our physical death?

With the gifts realized from enduring such a journey, I return to the beginning — or rather the beginning in relation to the present moment in time and space. What if this journey is infinite? If time is not linear, if all those moments of the past and future still exist within a different moment, then could it be that all of those relegated to our memory still in fact live on? In

desperation, I try to hold on to moments past; grief “is an unavoidable life experience that is not anticipated, in spite of any preparation; does not follow a temporal and limited sequence; and ultimately does not result in recovery, resolution, or successful elimination” (Moules, 2008, p 64). Within life we are a part of the state of existence, we are a part of a network of relationships in life which change and are re-established in death. As the moments continue to nourish us, support us, we become who we thought we were, and who we think we'll be.

Conversely, despite the moments of life and living, despite the relationships we share, the journey of grief is isolating. It is unique to each individual, creating a feeling of aloneness, and seclusion at any given moment. All of the anger, bewilderment, depression, and even acceptance are processed within a personal and silencing period of time. Despite the notion that we all go through similar feelings during grief, despite the fact that some reach out to those in grief to share and console, the person journeying through the grief feels totally, utterly alone. I wonder, if the journey of grief is different for each and despite one's desire to be comforted at times, why is this journey so isolating?

Grief and the multitude of experiences one has when grieving could be explained using the notion of creating order from things that appear random, or chaotic. To make sense of overwhelming chaos that may be brought forward when living with grief is acknowledging that these moments are not systematic; they are not predictable. The moments journeyed through grief are relative parameters within which we can only imagine until we are at that moment. Yet, the experience is fluid, it has order, and it is complex. "To understand a pattern we must map a configuration of relationships. In other words, structure involves quantities, while pattern

involves qualities" (Capra, 1996, p. 81). As we observe each other and ourselves the complex random existence of grief becomes an actuality that we can all relate to. It is an enterprise of the solitude that is joined; we share qualities in common experiences that are experienced at uncommon times. Uncommon moments, and uncommon experiences develop into islands of order in a sea of chaos. This sea of chaos becomes an ocean of commonality once we share, and discuss in the network that we share, "...the understanding of pattern is crucial to understand the living world around us" (Capra, 1996, p. 153). These patterns (which maybe mathematical Capra explains) form the networks and relationships in life. The relationships and patterns that are developed through the experiences of life, death, and grief are combinations of the components of change. Change is the endless flux that enables us to consistently grow, develop, and evolve. It is the essence of life. Grief is a journey where we sometimes feel we need order. Through this embodiment of non equilibrium we find "being manifested [is a] richness, diversity, and beauty of life all around us. Throughout the living world chaos is transformed into order" (Capra, 1996, p. 190).

Finding order within the journey of grief feels like a daunting task. However, it seems that one does not need to enforce this order, but that it is inevitable, bringing not only future moments of experiences but patience. "If you want to learn the total picture of human life, you have to tune in to the rhythm of life, the melody of the universe" (Katagiri, 2008, p. 166). Discovering that our isolation is structured based on our own existence of that moment and that it is released when the journey is shared. Moving to comfort within grief is challenging,

Grief has intensive, and sometimes unrelenting, elements of suffering and pain,
but it also has attributes of comfort, connection, and celebration... Grief is the

experience of keeping in relationship with the lost person, who although physically absent, is still profoundly a member of the family. Death does not mean the end of a relationship, but a change in the relationship, 'with new dimensions and possibilities' (Moules, 2004, p. 104).

The dimensions and conversations that grief creates are powerful as I realize how the network of relationships with both those who still live, those who have also experienced grief, as well as those who have died, allow us to heal, continue to dwell in life, and make meaning of our moments.

CONTEMPLATING THE LIFEWORLD OF THE CLASSROOM

In returning to the lifeworld within education, the implications of the above understandings are significant as the network within the school relations already exist; we share these connections, we share in this journey. As mentioned previously, living with grief is a duality of both a universal experience, and one that is intensely individual. If this is the case, why do we silence the interconnections held by those dwelling in the lifeworld of education, and enforce a pre-prescribed ordinance of dealing with grief and trauma in schools? Why do we not use the strength of the relationships between students and teachers to support the process of living with grief?

Such connections – powerful healing tools – allowing us to navigate our way through the complexities of life together could be transformative, if only they were allowed to grow. And so we come to the point in this writing where we ask the pertinent question: "What of all of this in

educational practice? How does this influence my understanding of how to be in the classroom?" Life is endless as the sand, random, as we dwell in each moment. The little voice in the back of my mind whispers, 'no wonder you sought to make some rational sense of it all.' And here is the trap. In our compartmentalizing, whether in science or education, we missed out on the whole reason for life. What does it all mean? How do we account for human relations? Where are the people that we love? In our endless quantifying and categorization, we have lost the essence of life. Conversely, in this tangled web of understanding, it seems that we often returned to a state of solitude. We are all trapped within our own perspectives and narratives, ways of understanding and projecting the world. The internal descriptions and forms that our lives should seemingly take define the metaphors we enact of the world. Such reductionism makes us no different from a mechanical "system" or a "clock." Where is life in all of this? Remember, life feels itself. Life is infinitely more than you or me; it is all of it. For me, these interconnected state of energies, and relationships emerge in the life of the classroom (Cohen, 1990).

Constituting experiences, dwelling in the interconnectedness of each of our stories is what occurs within our relationships, our families, and within Heidegger's "being-with-others-in-the-world" of the classroom (Heidegger, 2008). Inquiry into our existence as beings continuously links us to hermeneutics as:

Those modes of Being-in-the-world which are constitutive for knowing the world are interconnected in their foundations; this makes it plain that knowing, Dasein achieves a new status of Being toward a world which has already been discovered in Dasein itself (Heidegger, 2008, p. 90).

Accordingly I seek to understand the implicit connections and relationships between our understandings of space, time and chaos within the realm of education. How does our interconnected being-with-others-in-the-world develop in our classrooms within the sense of place, space and time in our continuity? Like all complex systems, the relations that are forged (arise) in the classroom as both individual and necessarily collective. The healing of grief, which many of us experience within the classroom through the forms of death, suicide, foster care, divorce, a move or the loss of a pet, results from the shared experiences, shared memories, and the continuation of life, that we embark upon. This does not remove the hurt or the loss, but makes room for new positive experiences. These experiences gain traction in our memory and ultimately sense-making, influencing our overall personal feelings, attitudes, and understandings. "The lived world is not the naive, theoretical conception of the world found in the natural attitude. It is, rather, the everyday social world, in which theory is always directed toward some practical end" (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p. 17). In this case, the everyday social world is the basis for the relationships that are developed within educational institutions. These relationships may provide the opportunity, a voice for the narrative, a place for our stories to be told. These stories are a tool to understand the world around us, as well as experiencing the self in the present. It is a relative truth that is shared, a personal story, which in turn, allows each of us to grow, mature, and gain new meaning and understandings of the world around us. In my experiences, this shared network allows possibility for growth; it is the essence of life. Taylor (1989) notes that

there are other important issues of life which we can only resolve through this kind of insight; for instance, why it matters and what it means to have a more deeply resonant human environment and, even more, to have affiliations with

some depth in time and commitment. There are questions which we can only clarify by exploring the human predicament, the way we are set in nature and among others, as a locus of moral sources...we need new languages of personal resonance to make crucial human goods alive for us again (p. 513).

This language of personal resonance, this question of human environment is what must be cultivated in schools. This is the hidden curriculum of life behind the learning outcomes and achievement tests. We nourish and develop life, the essence through which we dwell within classrooms (Chambers, 2008). This is the place where I can control what this essence will be. It is the place I can dwell, along with my students, creating a life within the classroom, reflecting the ideals, and environment to nurture all of us. We can take all of the fantastic substance that makes up life and be conscious. We can take all of this chaos, this moment, and dwell within it. To make this real, to make meaning of it, we need the "...ability to be reflective about what [we are] doing" (Greene, 2009, p. 161). The effort of creating meaning of theory, language, and new paradigms of thinking comes into play as we observe the lifeworld of the classroom and of the students and teachers (primarily) in the broader school. In contemplation, I ask of myself, what is the relationship to this grief, this tragedy, the utter rawness of the experience where we are present, dwelling not only in our time and place, but also in this situation where we live, teach, and learn? I am reminded, "our only purpose in life is growth. There are no accidents" (Kubler-Ross, 1997, p. 289). The essence of what is being learned in the classroom far surpasses strict disciplinary concepts of spelling, phonics, mathematics, dates, events, or facts. These concepts are continuously changing as they are understood in a new manner.

As Jill Bolte Taylor expresses in her TED.com talk, she became in tune with the energies, the boundlessness and interconnectedness that she possesses as a human being, while experiencing the onset of a stroke. She discovered a beauty, and essence in life that is not definitive in isolation, in comparison, or in organization, but rather through the networks of interconnectedness, that are so often ignored by each of us in our lives, as we focus on the tangible matter of life and silence the deep and in the meaningful connections we have in ourselves and with one another. Bolte Taylor (2008) describes, being connected in this interplay of networks, where space, time had little relevance, no order, it was as if she was immersed within energy. The journey that she endured reminds us that the liberation through the freedom of understanding ourselves through the moment of choice, to think, to be, not just within our defined classes, grades, or subjects, but through the community and shared energies of the lifeworld, the power of the universe with a choice as to who we are in the world. This passion, the act of being and living in each moment, within the disorder and theories also play out in the classroom.

Create an atmosphere within education; create the sense of possibilities, of questions, of support and of love. It is through this means that we are able to continue to feel each of us can make a difference.

We can hope to communicate the recognition that persons become more fully themselves and open to the world if they can be aware of themselves and open to the world if they can be aware of themselves appearing before others, speaking in their own voices and trying as they do so to bring into being a common world... In part it will be created by story, by giving voice to personal perspectives,

listening to others' stories, seeking agreement, enlarging on it, and trying to expand the referent of what is shared (Greene, 1995, p 68).

It is a place to shape who you are and who you wish to be; there is choice, influenced by history, culture and the connectedness of community. As you bring these influences about you are free to define who you are in that moment. Designing and bringing together an environment in education where this is shared with students and educators during times of grief, strong sense of community within a class.

The interconnectedness of the self and the world around us is illustrated through the imagery of the repeated patterns of life, and the interwoven macro and micro elements that form who we are. Beginning with the roots of our existence, they are reflections of who we are, who we were, and who we are going to be. They are formed by the essence of life, the complexities, and the tensions of history, culture, and connections with our community that influence us. I've been wondering about how we might imagine our place in this broader world. This chaos, this interwoven state of being is reflective of our lives within education, as we balance our presence and experience as teachers with our inner experiences as human beings. This complex relationship parallels my experiences as a mother, daughter, and educator living in grief. The energies created through shared existence allows for healing, for understanding, and for questioning, an idea that "we need to think systemically, shifting our conceptual focus from objects to relationships. Only then can we realize that identity, individuality, and autonomy do not imply separateness and independence" (Capra, 1996, p. 295).

In all of these notions, these understandings, and these contemplations, we come to a point of asking ourselves 'so what?' What do we make of these musings and dwelling within the integrated concepts of scientific theory that has difficulty proving itself within its own parameters? "Trying to cling to our rigid categories instead of realizing the fluidity of life, we are bound to experience frustration after frustration" (Capra, 1996, p. 295). These rigid categories are called into question when we are faced with a meaningless death, the grief that ensues and the moments that follow. Or do they? These moments only defy logic based on our current understandings. Dwell with these moments, accepting them, and growing with them. This day will not come again. So what is the point? We make lists of dreams to help carry us through to hope, we need to remember to cherish each moment. We seek to make sense of what faces us; we need to journey through this, as sometimes the strength we gain does not show itself until the randomness defines its order. The important fact is that it is not about all the things we have, all the facts we can regurgitate, or all the mathematical problems we can solve. It is about how to live our life. In the classroom it is about wanting "to believe that education has been a means of giving every living person access to any sort of discourse that person might prefer..." (Greene, 1995, p. 110). It is not about you or me, it is about the network of relationships that support us, free us, and pass on our understandings to those around us. As Aoki (2009) explains, "my suffering is always uniquely embedded in a story in which I am the seeming narrator, it is never mine alone but always ours. The locus of suffering is not the objective so-called 'natural' world of individual people and things, but rather, the *fathomless intimacy of narration*. *Person is narration, a centerless space of dramatic interplay*" (p. 410). The centerless space of dramatic interplay is about life, love, and laughter; here, now, in this moment - interrupted.

In bringing these notions, thus far, together I come to ask myself: what is the point to all of this? Why does it matter? What does this have to do with grief, as it manifests within the lifeworld of the classroom? How do the relationships that are formed come to live within an institutional setting such as education? Why does our understanding of space, time, embodiment of self, matter? The following chapter explores the notion of opportunity, the concept that this narrative, the stories we keep and use to define our understandings could be different than the way that they are, the way we understand them now. It is an essential interruption.

OPPORTUNITY – AND THEN THERE IS TUESDAY

CHAPTER FIVE

WOR(L)DS FROM A CONVERSATION

Conflict
Fear
Situation
Other
Difference
Lifeworld
Detail
Lurk
Silence
Anxiety
Referent
Deconstruct
Choice
Access
Happening
Tell me
Shocking
Power
Inequality
Sanity
Height
Position
Mode
Narrative
Position
Pieces
Challenge
Multifaceted
Siege
Negative
Tarnish
Hope
Institution
Expectation
Live with it
Live within it
What is created by the narrative
Power
Media
Control
Abandon

Entrapment
Responsibility
Inherently
Content
Contained
Space
Colonize
Be there
AND THEN THERE IS TUESDAY

These words were written during a class at the University of Calgary (November 17, 2010), they interrupted me continuously, causing me to ponder, discuss, and question.

The words came at me like a stream of consciousness. They flowed continuously, filled with tension, interrupting my thoughts, my way of being. They made no sense. At first I couldn't find a way to express all of these words, these notions that fill the page of an obscured list hidden by poetry. They are entrenched, enriching in my thinking, my understanding, and my being. I dwell in these words, these tensions, and these thoughts. They haunt me. They scare me. This fear is rooted in the fact that this is not a story of a nameless student, of the stereotypical images we see in the newspaper of children in schools, sitting in classrooms, playing in playgrounds, smiling for the camera. This is not a story of a nameless teacher who lives in some other place, at some other time, a someone who we don't know; their hopes, their dreams, their families, their beliefs, their values. This is my story. I live this. I am that teacher, that image. You see, I live in this place, this world, and this classroom filled with so much life, so much joy, and so much happiness. I live in that place of so much confusion, frustration, suffering, and sadness. I believe there are two perspectives to crises management in classrooms.

When living in grief and trauma in schools, we are instructed on how to best cope. We are handed the policies and procedures to be followed. These policies claim their space as the metanarrative of our system; they are the authority on how to best cope with a crisis situation. However, in times of crisis, we each experience the situation differently. It is not a problem to be solved, but an experience to be lived. Many aspects impact this experience and how it is played out. In this chapter, I examine classroom relationships and their meanings in contrast to the metanarrative practices of the Calgary Board of Education's Crisis Manual (2009) that guides our educational policies when dealing with grief and trauma. I contrast the complexity of relationships, language, and experience, as is articulated by the postmodern paradigm—giving

rise to the multivocal metanarratives of our classroom. There are a multitude of perspectives to be recognized, and to be heard. I have lived in the classroom long after the crises, the trauma, and the challenge. I have dwelled in that place with those children, exploring the narrative that becomes our story.

And so we begin at the end. The phone call, the realization that a child has died. A child found life not worth living, did not fit in, felt invisible. This child, who had his life, dreams, aspirations, goals, love, loss ahead of him, felt that the world around him was not beautiful enough to survive. This child took a knife, slicing up the insides of his legs, down the insides of his arms, and then from his sternum down in his gut. I wonder-- what did he feel? Was this enough to make him feel alive, when he drained the blood from his soul? The ambulance comes, the doctors stitch up his wounds, he is put on machinery that pumps the fluids around his organs, keeping him alive. He regains consciousness. His family explains it to themselves, and to us, as night terrors.

And so, six months later, after having both legs amputated due to gangrene infection, after never regaining the use of his left arm, after the machines continue to pump the life through his body, his organs give up. He dies. Six months after the original attempt. Why? Why so long? Why this prolonged journey for him, for his family?

The staff meeting is called over the PA system. I walk down stairs into a sombre room where the entire staff is sitting with their backs against the walls where the official announcement is made. Following this statement of gut wrenching disbelief, mixed with a sense of relief, sadness, and

confusion, our instructions on how to handle the situation followed. Gathered in the staff room, we were told of the process and most importantly, what to say to our students.

We were to read the pre-prescribed statement to the students, answer any questions with 'I have no further information.' Grief councillors were in the school for the next two or three days. The students who were closest to him were given time to deal with this loss, however we were advised to continue on as normal for the benefit of both those who are grieving, and those who did not know him. Some classes hold funerals as well as other celebration of life ceremonies. Some feel helpless, some feel guilty, and why didn't any of us see this? The students are equally conflicted. Emotions are raw, electrified, and awkward. And so the process begins. I bring my assigned script to my class. I do as I am told: I read it; answer the questions I am allowed to, answers I don't know to any other questions. I silence the process. It feels cold, calculated, and dry. It feels like a procedure – it is anesthetised. And so begins the tension within me, the conflict within the system, the silenced cry that screams what is normal now?!

The Critical Incident Response Team arrives the following day. I can't tell you who they are, other than that they are strangers in the staff room. The services are made available to students should they need to discuss the death of their friend and classmate. A few students speak with them. Many do not. After two days, these strangers are no longer in our building. The only remnant of their presence is an email address on a whiteboard. That's it. The rest of the week school life proceeds as normal. On Friday we are given the option to go to the funeral the following day. No other mention of this 'incident' is made. It is silent.

The narrative is dominated by the policy, instructing us on what to say, letters to be handed out, and questions that are allowed to be answered. And yet, what is wrong with the policy and procedures? They are clear, concise, and ensure that the needs of those who may be affected are offered appropriate supports. The manual outlines and defines a variety of crises that a school may have to deal with. A critical incident is “when a sudden, arbitrary event occurs. It is not developmental and not anticipated” (Calgary Board of Education, 2009, p. 22). The purpose of this manual is to manage and guide the school population by outlining the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) in order to reduce “the incident, the duration, the severity of or the impairment from crisis and trauma” (Calgary Board of Education, 2009, p. 22). This manual provides checklists, basic plans, definitions, sample letters to the community, and procedures for handling emergencies and crises. A plan of coping and dealing with students is encouraged; handout exemplars and telephone scripts are provided, as well as a brief on understanding children and their response to death are all included. The policy and procedures outlined by the Calgary Board of Education outlines thirteen steps that are both recommended and optional policies for dealing with the sudden death of a student or staff member. The policies are factual, instructional and expository. They are the guidelines that deal with death and trauma in the school. In step two they note that “Death is an emotional issue and it will need to be discussed openly to prevent pathological responses from developing. The Critical Incident Response Team will debrief staff and review strategies for dealing with student inquiries and grief reactions. Issue of death must be discussed openly” (Calgary Board of Education, Officer of the Chief Superintendent of Schools, 2009, p. 23). These recommendations are sound, a place to go to in times of crisis especially when one has to face a serious incident such as the death of a student.

This manual provides a method by which to ensure that you are providing support for staff and students. A number of steps are set out to guide the administration through the process:

1. Gather the facts
2. Optional support Item
3. Meet with staff to advise them of details and circumstances surrounding the death
4. Explain to staff to plan of how to deal with students
5. Prepare a hand-out for teachers of the facts to discuss with their class
6. Optional – have substitutes available to relieve staff for short periods of time should their own emotional reactions render them incapable of fulfilling their duties
7. Staff should identify close friends of the victim
8. Establish areas for counselling
9. Prepare a letter to be sent home to all parents
10. Allow staff and students to attend the funeral
11. If the death is a suicide, caution should be followed so neither the death or the victim is glorified
12. Tributes to the deceased may be planned
13. Reconvene with staff and crisis team at the end of the day
14. Advise appropriate Superintendent or Director (Calgary Board of Education, 2009, p. 25-26)

This manual continues to outline goals that should be met by the school's administration during debriefings. It offers questions to address, helpful hints as well as a brief summary in order to understand children's responses to death and a timeline for debriefing after a traumatic event. The manual focuses on the debriefing of the critical incident, as it states the value of this process. "A debriefing attends to the emotional and cognitive needs of people" (Calgary Board of Education, 2009, p. 53). There are five goals of this debriefing:

- To accelerate the rate of "normal recovery, in normal people, who are having normal reactions to abnormal events."
- Stopping the acute process of psychological deterioration/decompensation that typifies a crisis condition.
- Stabilization of cognitive and affective process.
- Management of acute symptoms of psychological distress and dysfunction.
- Restoration of independent adaptive functioning or providing assistance in receiving continued acute care (Calgary Board of Education, 2009, p. 53).

The restoration of normal, stabilizing the process are important elements in any functioning company, however, these processes seem to void the relationships that people have with one another in education. These policies are also problematic as they silence the encounter, the lifeworld in the classroom, and the relationships we develop with our students as educators. They create a mould without the human component that is so very real in our encounters within the classroom. The prescribed process continues without honouring the unique situation each of us may be at the time of grief and trauma. Essentially, they universalize a situation, while silencing the individual, causing a rupture in the duality.

RE-EMBODYING MY VOICE

The complexity of grief, relationships, and placing the metanarrative of policy and procedure against the complex relationships and sensitivity to difference is problematic. The tension and power inherent in this bureaucratic policy and practice dictates how I, as a teacher, must meet the goals and “restoration of independent adaptive functioning or providing assistance in receiving continued acute care” (Calgary Board of Education, 2009, P. 53). It does not guide me as a human on how to adequately deal with the loss of a student or how I must support my students through this time. This process is to be referred to the Crisis Support Team. The relationships shared within the classroom, between students and colleagues are silenced. The process of the therapeutic dialogue causes me to feel trapped by this process. Instructed on *how* to speak and support my students, I am asked to relinquish my relationships and authority to a distinct,

analytical stranger, who is following a policy. This does not honour the purpose of grief, the strength in the relationships within the classroom, nor the relationship with the deceased.

...A theory of grieving should promote respect for the individuality of the griever.

It should provide openings to dialogue about a) the uniqueness of his or her ways of finding and making meaning in life with the one who died, b) his or her particular experience of and vulnerability in bereavement, and c) the distinctive challenges and opportunities he or she engages with in grieving. Third, a good theory should also account for the helplessness of bereavement. It should a) acknowledge its sources and dangers, b) recognize the difference between the choicelessness of bereavement and reactions to it and the choice-filled character of grieving, and c) define constructive responses to helplessness. Fourth, a good theory should provide guidance for caregiver response to those who grieve. It should promote not only compassion for bereavement and the pain and anguish it entails but also ideas about supporting active response to life-transforming events (Attig, 2004, p. 345).

Educators are silenced in this process; we are to refer our grief to others. My students will not be comforted by the person they know and with whom they have a strong relationship, but by someone they do not know or trust. It is not personal. Education, is framed through the dualities of a modernist construct.

The division between the mind and body, between subjects, the accountability and the structure of input/output and structured assessment suggests a factory line system of imparting knowledge.

This is also reflected in the process dealing with crises and trauma in education. Just as in grief stage theory, these policies require that a sequential number of steps must be observed/covered in speaking to students, teachers, and parents about a school tragedy. Following these steps is evidence of educational accountability in the context of crises management. What are missing here are the people, the humanity, the life breath, and the essence of life. The lifeworld, our existence, is not a fixed state of being to be handed out when trauma arises. "What we experience in the present is actually the result of a complex web of meanings that is constantly changing. Through language and concepts, we impose the sense of objective meaning on the flux of experience" (Grenz, 1996, p. 144). The procedures outlined by the Calgary Board of Education are *words*, and they are missing the life and experience in their process; they are missing the *world*. This process interrupts the relationships within education, causing tension and incites me to think: what if our experience of this trauma was dealt with differently in schools and classrooms?

The complexities of educational policies, practices, language and power often forge silences that are deafening as they blur our lived-experience. Language and dialogue is a powerful medium through which we express emotions, thoughts, occurrences, confusion; it is also a powerful tool used to create relationships of power and understandings as we attempt to understand ourselves and others. Making the text speak "is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative but, as a question it is related to the answer that is expected in the text" (Gadamer, 2006, p. 370). Thus the offer of counselling, and the expertise of specialists in the school is in the end an accountable measure that suggests that something was dealt with. In practice, one might ask: why would children, especially those who have often been betrayed and hurt by the

system, by adults, by trusted upstanding members of our society, want to speak with adults they do not know? In these cases, why would children take part in the discourse and power structure created within a system which does not know them, nor has it developed a positive relationship with them? Why is it acceptable that this is the predominant form of support for young students? And why is this considered an adequate response shared with a total stranger? The connection between caring and understanding is not always established within this format. Multiple avenues to establish the understandings, caring, and support must be established in order for the students and teachers to navigate this journey of grief and trauma, as “continuing bonds could function as coping methods that encourage good adjustment following the loss of a loved one” (Root and Exline, 2013, p. 5). Working together during times of crisis could ensure the support and positive bonds and re-establishing of relationships that are essential in order to meet the needs of the students.

The power of language in schools, who has a voice, who is heard, and what practices are valued comes to play in the way in which we cope with trauma and crises. The dominant voice—that of bureaucratic policy and procedure— that is heard must also be in sync with the moral norms that are common to the life of each classroom. However, in spite of this institutional power there is the other, the voice that is not policy and procedure that has deep roots in the lifeworld of the classroom. The essence of life that is silenced in this dominance resurges through other means, through life, through presence, through being in the lifeworld. "That discourse is, in the process of self-exposition. True knowledge, in this perspective, is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy" (Lyotard, 1979, p. 35). The interplay of the individual voices is

mediated by the way we use language in education during times of crises. When trauma occurs in a school, or to a student who is a member of our school community, there are certain procedures that are not only dictated by the Calgary Board of Education, but also by the family and society as a whole. These procedures are the mechanism that orchestrates appropriate protocols. The immediate aspects are twofold: the way the educational system conducts itself through practice and policy as well as the power of the languaging that takes hold during these times of crisis. These two aspects must be reflected upon as it is these procedures, this languaging that dictates the relationships of power between not only the individuals in the school, but I would argue, silences the lifeworld that lives in the classroom community.

In theory, I agree with these processes. They are important, and yes we need to ensure each and every student has the opportunity to speak with a person trained in crises management. Yes, we need to ensure certain aspects are enacted to communicate effectively with members of our school community. Yes, we need to acknowledge that people will be affected by trauma in different ways. But here is where I pause. I wonder, to ensure that this difficult time is 'dealt' with appropriately why is the life sucked out of these methods? Where is the voice of the teacher and the students in these procedures? Why do our feelings and understandings need to be validated by another, more powerful (expert) voice in order to give our healing legitimacy? "Grief is the process whereby we gradually discover what remains and find a new place for the one who is gone" (Tunstall and Worgan, 2009, p. 4). Grief is not something that is done, it is an emotion and an experience that is unique to each individual. How do we support students through such difficulties both in the short and long term? In a room full of children with different experiences, relationships and differing supports in place at home, how is it that they

are to fit within procedural steps? Where is the narrative of compassionate healing in these steps? Why is this not acknowledged in the procedures? The procedures, as well as the supports put in place are finite; they expect a beginning and an end. While outside experts and grief councillors are in the school for a matter of days, however “whilst bereavement is considered to be a normal human experience with the majority of individuals adapting over time to their loss, grief, however, remains an extremely painful period where adjustments can take months, if not years” (Morris, 2011). Alternatively, the relationship that a teacher can have with their students is much more powerful. This relationship, I argue, needs to be at the forefront in dealing with crises and trauma, and yet “If I give an account, and give it to you, then my narrative depends upon a structure of address...I must first have been addressed, brought into the structure of address as a possibility of language before I was able to find my own way to make use of it” (Butler, 2005, p. 53). Gadamer (2006) states “Understanding begins when something addresses us” (p. 298). If we are to understand how to be with the students to support them through grief and trauma, we need to be able to ‘be’ with them, we need to be able to understand them and connect with them. Jennifer George explored this phenomenon with her students and addressing what is meaningful to her students. In her MA thesis, *On pedagogy and memory*, she states, “All along I thought that in order to [give meaning] I needed to convince them to leave the previous year behind when in fact that would have rendered that entire year meaningless. Instead I needed to reinforce to them that it had meaning...What was the connection? What would be the collective memory that would bring them back?” (George, 2009, p. 73). Like her experience in the classroom with her students and bringing meaning to their learning, we may bring the particular subject of loss and grief, and the effective way to bring meaning to the students’ understandings. She continues to illustrate the importance of bringing meaning to student’s

voices. George (2009) asks, “What happens when you do not honour student voice? You end up with a class of children without passion or purpose. What happens when a child is labeled a problem because they ask too many questions? You get a child that acts out, seeks attention, spends their time in the office and worse yet, stops asking, stops wondering, stops wanting” (p. 76). The relationship between the students and teachers is profound and meaningful. Being able to speak with students, respond to their questions, and strengthen the connections they have with the world is vital during times of grief. In addition, “it is important to explore how continuing bong experiences impact the survivor’s view of the deceased and of themselves” (Root and Exline, 2013, p. 13). The connection is threefold in this process. I need to have my own voice addressed by the policies and procedures that brings the *word* to a *world*. In this *world* I address my students, my colleagues, and myself. The language of the *word* does not recognize that I know my students. I know who is sensitive, who lacks confidence and depends on others, whose anger is to cover feelings of inadequacy, and who does nothing for fear of failure. I know my students, who they are, what makes them laugh, what engages them. I understand them, live with them in this space of our classroom; I dwell in this space with them.

LIFE BEYOND POLICIES

In writing, pondering, and contemplating this process it finally dawned on me. I come to understand what the tension is; the process and procedure in coping with grief through the model provided by the Calgary Board of Education has become a kind of metanarrative. It has become the voice of reason that dictates and guides the process of dealing with trauma and grief in the classroom; it is representative of all knowledge and explains everything. “In reality, guidelines that address every eventuality simply do not exist... They must not blindly buy into a framework

that says ‘do this’ or ‘don’t do that’” (Austin, Bergum, Nuttgens, Peternelj-Taylor, 2006, p. 84). Nevertheless, the policies and procedures have become the legitimate method of coping with death, trauma and crises in the classroom; therefore, any other strategy becomes de-legitimized in this process. The methodology of systematically living with trauma silences the other, silences the possibility of an opportunity, vulnerability, another way of being. This process is defined, ultimately by what it is not. Within the school, external instruction, rather than the internal dialogue of the class guides the system. “Instead of gaining closure or trying to say goodbye, the goal of grief counseling should be to foster a constructive continuing bond with a deceased person...This can be accomplished through remembering the good times, setting up an internal dialogue with a lost loved one, continuing to think of that person on a regular basis and imagining the person's reactions to current life events and problems” (Kersting, 2004). The essential question is: what is the best practice in supporting our students in constructing a continuous bond? Is there some way we can use the strength in the relationship between the teachers and students to support this? Is it ok not to have all the answers, to seek power and knowledge in policy but to be vulnerable, open, and explore our lifeworld together, unsure of the results? George explores this notion throughout her writing, as she journeyed with her students through memory and pedagogy. She states, “A critical component of the work was allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. We allowed ourselves to be affected. We relinquished ourselves to the kind of journey that would make us suffer, remember, forget, remember again, make us notice, ask us to pay attention, and make us care... The experience (*Erfahrung*) has cultivated a lasting memory, and like our ancestors (*Vorfahrung*) who journeyed (*Fahrung*) before us, we have become someone new in the process” (George, 2009, p. 97). The freedom to dwell, to be vulnerable, and to journey with our students in times of grief and trauma can allow the time and

space convolute understanding to have meaning, be explored, and support each student in what they need, and what we as educators need during times of grief and trauma.

I continue to struggle within the metanarrative of policy as it conjectures a singularity in stating a particular process. We are not free to explore or be vulnerable in these times, but must maintain control. This "modern worldview assumes that reality is ordered and that human reason is capable of discerning this order as it is manifested in the laws of nature" (Lyotard, 1979, p. 40). The issue with this understanding of the world is that in reality when coping with a crisis, there are no set rules and regulations. Our own biographical diversity influences and dictate our views, thoughts, and choices. These thoughts, choices, cultures, and beliefs create an individual relationship of languaging that is unique for each of us. I question how this Calgary Board of Education policy and process on trauma, as a dominant metanarrative, can ever hope to speak to these relationships. When living in a situation where we have lost a student, we must ask, how will this impact each of these children? It will look different depending on each of the individuals' relationship with the student who died, their own experience with death, their age, among a multitude of other possibilities. For some students silence and eventual cathartism maybe a long way off. For example, one particular student, who was quite close to the student who died, did not want to speak with anyone about what happened. She did not speak to counsellors, to her teachers, nor her friends. She chose not to attend his funeral. During her final Humanities project, which was to represent the student's changed worldview over the course of the year, she created a powerful representation that illustrated how adolescents are never truly seen for who they are. She conveyed how teens are never viewed as whole people; they are never fully present. She continued her presentation, punctuated by images of teenagers

hidden with blindfolds, by stating that these people who commit suicide are never truly seen, and once they are gone, continue to be hidden, invisible to others blinded by their own perception and judgement; blinded by the systems within their lives. This presentation was powerful, awakening, and gut wrenching. I ask, rhetorically, where does this fit in the procedure? How can this be represented within the metanarrative of crises management and its procedures? It fits within the world and relationships. “As caregivers, we can help those who grieve to discern ways in which they can continue to care about what those who died care about. We can support them in sustaining dynamic, nonobsessive loving connectedness with the deceased by living in terms of those cares” (Attig, 2011, p. 191). The interlocking pieces of collective individuality continue to develop through the constraints and perspectives within the institution. However, when regarding education as an institution, these structures of power influence and, in some cases, constrain us, yet there continues to be a lifeworld within education, within each of our classes, and within the dynamics of the relationships between student and teacher. It is here that the multiple facets of grief have the opportunity to be explored. “Awareness is emerging that grieving may not be just a negative process but also a time for post-traumatic growth, reassessment of the meaning of life, and an opportunity to evaluate the important elements of life (for example, human relationships, well-being, and spirituality)” (Gordon, 2013, p. 29). Imagine the possibilities of exploration of life experiences, and grief experiences, as students connect the curriculum to themselves and the world around them. Gordon (2013) goes on to explain,

Psychologically, people can experience relief and joy that the person is no longer suffering; increased self-esteem for fulfilling their role with the dying person; greater self efficacy around things that they have learned through the process; and a greater appreciation of life in general... Socially, they can appreciate more the

old and new friendships, reach out to others, and find mutual support and value relationship in a deeper way (p. 29).

These structures may be bound in some aspects such as, policies, manuals, certified crises counselling, however the quantified analysis does not recognize these aspects of the lifeworld and languaging within our classroom. Educators are in the profession of providing education, of listening to the needs of students, and of providing support and being available and respectful to their students. Working together with Crisis Management Team and Grief counsellors, educators could provide an effective support system for students as they learn to live in a new 'normal.' This is especially important when considering "that it is not effective to offer unsolicited help to bereaved people for no other reason than they have lost somebody" (Schut, 2010, p. 9). Considering the trust and relationships that students share with people in their schools, effective support for students may well come from the established relationships.

OPPORTUNITY

The challenge I am confronted with, as I navigate the policies and the relationships I have with my students is uncovered, often just lurking in the narrative. It is a hidden curriculum, the dialogue that is engaged in between students, between teachers and students and between teachers themselves. This narrative is the life within the classroom; it evokes the feelings, the strengths, and the weaknesses. This narrative is the passion within us all that makes us laugh out loud, cry, and empathise. This narrative is the humanness within us all. "Recently, there has been a shift among bereavement theorists away from the emphasis on detachment and toward a willingness to include maintained connections with the deceased as a natural part of the

bereavement process – and beyond that, a salutary factor in grief resolution” (Root and Exline, 2013, p. 4). The policies that display honour for our students and teachers needs to be progressive and move towards a procedure that enriches and deepens the relationships as the students require. When it is dictated by the current policy this narrative can be silenced for some. “Many teachers as casualties of the knowledge society, have come to see teaching as a sink-or-swim world where only the immediate moments are of concern. Reaction, not pro-action, has become the norm and the accepted way of doing things in the school” (Kanu & Glor, 2006, p. 110). Shaped within the discourse of process, in terms of accountability and structured understanding the conversation changes. “Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy” (Lyotard, 1979, p. xxv). The policies and procedures written to guide the administrative team in schools during times of crises, by their very definition, subvert the relationships within the classroom, the languaging, and the bond that is both unique and individual, formed by each of us collectively and in isolation.

We are not statistics. We are human, humane, filled with life, emotions, intuition, and connected by relationships. During times of crisis, “support from others has been an important protective factor for trauma and grief” (Nader and Salloum, 2011, p. 251). We are not an outcome-based object to be analysed. Our relationship with others and the language that we use connect us and creates a meaning deeper than any policy, any analysis, and any process. This is reflected in the importance of grief, as people find “the construction of meaning as an interpersonal, as well as personal process” (Neimeyer, 2000, p. 552). This is where I come to ask, what changes can be

made to the policy and procedure that may be recognized in the individual experience? Can we voice the plurality of the *world* in which we dwell in the presence of trauma, crises, or any other moment? How do we give voice to those who do not wish to speak with the counsellors, the teachers or the friends? Where is the space to recognize other modes of healing and understanding? How can the multitude of cultural differences, beliefs, and understandings in times of death be voiced? Working with children and adolescence, there are often contrasts in policy and process that conflict with the questions and interests that are raised by students themselves. The procedural outline of crises management does not voice the intensity of the moment, it does not convey the life, the emotions the conflict, fear, difference, or detail of breath. It is a *word*. This document is a word that is exactly as it states, a procedure. But we are not products of a factory-- we are not an exposition. We are missing an opportunity to “support persons as they reconfigure patterns of interacting with others, including family, friends, acquaintances, persons at work, or others in the wider community” (Attig, 2011, p. 125). Within each crisis there is a narrative that occurs, relishing in both the unique individuality of the experience, as well as the universality that we share in this moment; at any given time it may be otherwise. There is a discourse that occurs within each classroom, an oral language that reaches us as individuals. The procedure eliminates the individuality, the wholeness of the person, the being, the life, the *world*. In 1986, Barnes expressed the vitality and importance of the support a teacher can offer students, “With [a teacher’s] skilled and patient concern, the child/young person will be better able to work through the grief process and to adjust to life without the deceased” (p. 185). When coping with death, trauma, and crises in the classroom this *world* must be present, honoured, and celebrated.

WOR(L)DS TO CONCLUDE BY THE EPILOGUE

After the hours of reading, pondering, and discussing the various stories which has interrupted me in this phenomenon, I continue to be caught in the by the universal notion that there is no single truth. The life within the classroom, as with all phenomenon in life, cannot be isolated or objectified (Gadamer, 2006). These experiences are fluid. As illustrated in *Living in the World as if it were Home*:

Contemplation's observations are ...shy of clarity, of precise definition: they come with the loss of the desire to still the world in thought even as the mind continues to crane forward, toppling. Its knowledge of the world is like the slowly accreting 'blood knowledge' by which the immigrant comes to feel at home in, be fed by, a new geography, and a new culture. It is not quantifiable, teachable, marketable, cannot be commanded, but is indispensable: it is the learning of a relationship that nourishes, makes life possible (Lilburn, 1999, p. 37).

These temporal understandings continue to shift, to grow, and to interrupt me. They lead me to further question and provoke. I would like to provoke all of us to question our understanding of the norm. How it might be possible to consider the question of opportunity? Can we dare to change, to question, and to think that a situation may be different - that there may be some differences in the way things occur, that the narrative of life may be in some way transformed into the possibility of an alternative? To propose an alternative to what is known is to acknowledge this limit, this comparison, and this duality of modernism, which we have

inherited. We have a responsibility to know what we are doing and why we are doing it, taking action to improve and contribute to the process and policies in our lives. We often don't realize how we affect the lifeworld in which we live, we are consumers of success, accountability, and assessment; we are often surprised how these occur. We need to be sure to be conscientious, deliberate, thoughtful, and pedagogical in our journey with grief and trauma. Patricia Kostouros (2012) illustrates this in her PhD thesis, *Whose trauma is it anyways?*

Much of what happens in classrooms will depend on the community that presents itself, or is based on what is cultivated. What competent teachers may use particular procedures in their practice, to relegate this topic to a set of techniques means I have disregarded teachers' abilities to call up their own practical wisdom and use their authority well... The need to respect students' vulnerabilities in light of teaching positioning, and therefore, the precariousness of the teacher-student relationship (p. 243).

Educators are an important part of students' lives; we need to develop our relationships with those who create the policies, as well as with the specialists in order to most effectively support our students. We continue to invest in a superficial account of education, and we are missing an opportunity, we are constantly trying to catch up. We need to create the momentum to reach deeper, and move beyond the awkward side effects and the impacts that we live with as educators and as students. I would like to propose a questioning, and acknowledge an opportunity, one that reflects the "notion that we are all dependant on one another, we are bound to one another and that all of our lives are grievable. In order to understand suffering and grief, we must be thoughtful about how we use pedagogic materials that depict the suffering other" (Kostouros, 2012, p. 260). The opportunity I suggest is a thoughtful, meaningful narrative

within which we live everyday comes about in our worlds, in our lives, in our classrooms. It should at once be heard with a greater voice, and used to strengthen our life in schools, in our education and in our being and living souls.

The experience of living in grief in education is filled with paradoxes. We are challenged to follow proposed guidelines, orchestrating our conversations, while obliterating the meaning behind the relationships that we have with each other. We are to follow these guidelines as teachers not as experts, as psychologists who are trained in these matters. However, “the question arises whether interventions to teach resilience—programs already instituted in schools and in the military—will really help if people cope naturally on their own” (Stix, 2011). I question, why are we not taught and trained in the area of grief, or relationships, as this is the foundation of our daily interactions with our students, especially in light that what we are currently doing for our children’s wellbeing may or may not be effective. What opportunity can we provide, so that we may build upon what we have, rather than limiting and compartmentalizing the aspects of our lifeworld in education? The experience of teaching is filled with paradoxes. We are challenged, as we are filled with hope. What possibilities exist for such transformation?

Whether or not we wish to acknowledge this lifeworld, it continues to affect our students and ourselves. As I write these last few words, my students continue to live in grief: two of my students have lost a parent to cancer in the last year. One of these students told me he “was sad for twenty-three days, and now he is done being sad over the loss of his father to liver cancer. But his mom is still sad, and he wishes she would get over it.” In addition to these losses one of

our staff members was diagnosed with cancer this past year, and was off work for some time. These events, these lives are part of what our lifeworld in education. These events are limited to those effected by cancer, let along gang violence, divorce, drugs, and alcohol abuse, physical and emotional abuse among many other factors which effect my students and the staff on a daily basis. We must be realistic about the lives our students and our colleagues live. We must be ready to embrace the challenges that are inherent in our pedagogic lives.

I admire and appreciate the experiences my students live through, as they share their lives with me, and as they have taught me much as I dwell and reflect on all that they are, and all that I am with them. As their teacher, they educate me; fill me with passion to inspire them, as they inspire me. They constantly humble me with their strength, their thoughts, and their energy to seize each moment, and laugh in the face of adversity. They speak honestly, work through relationships, challenges, and grief. They give me hope.

Grief is a word that, at one time or another, will resonate in all our lives. It appears in our lives in unexpected ways, at unexpected moments, and is often covered, hidden, and misunderstood. Yet each of us experiences grief during our lives, whether as children, or adults, as it is imposed upon us by our experiences in the world: death, divorce, moving, loss, are among some of the events which lead us to experience this emotion, this way of living in the world. “The loss happens in time, in fact in a moment, but its aftermath lasts a lifetime... The pain of loss is so intense, so heartbreaking, because in loving we deeply connect with another human being, and grief is the reflection of the connection that has been lost... That pain and our love are forever connected” (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 203). Moules, Prins, Angus and Bell (2004) note that “our

research offers the idea that grief does not need to disappear to resolve, that in fact its very presence is what serves to help maintain this relationship. What needs to be challenged here is the definition of grief as only sorrowful, as opposed to the poignant, important reminder of the lost person” (p. 103). How we live with grief, and how we cope with grief is often influenced by the relationships we have with others in our lives; how we bring this forward within our educational community is vital to both our students and our teachers.

The relationships within which we dwell are meaningful and intimate throughout many facets of our lives. The complexities of these relationships are intense and complex within the realm of education, yet these are often unrecognized. “In asking the ethical question ‘How ought I to treat another?’” particularly within the setting of education and the emotional state of grief, we are confronted by, or “caught up in a realm of social normativity” (Butler, 2005, p. 25). The state of grieving within education is fixed by a norm. Kubler-Ross (2005) states, “Most corporations allow three to five days of bereavement. Very few, if any, will say, ‘Take as much time as you need, this is a very difficult time.’ Our work usually allows one death per year. After our bereavement time we must go back to our work” (p. 26). In being caught up in the norm of our society, the relationships which exist within our educational setting, as well as our relationship with death dance together silently in the background of the setting, yet in the foreground of our minds. These relationships are further intensified as we address grief, loss, and death among the story of life within the classroom. As educators we live within these parameters of relationships. “In the long run, those who are concerned about the ability of all teachers to teach all students well must join their concerns about improvements within local schools and schools of education with a commitment to create policy environments that foster the development of powerful

preparation for effective teaching” (National Academy of Education, 2005, p. 69). I would suggest that the lifeworld in the classroom needs to be recognized as crucially important to relationships between students and educators and that these relationships may be of benefit during times of grief, trauma, and bereavement.

Respect for any one of us as a survivor requires learning of our unique life histories and ways of experiencing, acting in, connecting with, and caring about the world around us. It requires learning what challenges us as individuals as we cope with, or relearn, virtually everything in the worlds of our experience. We grieve as individuals by meeting and addressing such specific and idiosyncratic challenges and tasks. Without knowledge of such details of our experiences, other people’s understanding our individual grieving remains utterly superficial and incomplete, and respect for us as individuals is impossible” (Attig, 2011, p. 123).

The connections students have with one another, as well as the connection they have with teachers, supports the relationship rebuilding with the deceased, the relearning of the world, and of ourselves. Amidst this, I continue to explore and understand deeply how grief is dealt with in our society and how it might manifest itself in the daily life of school. What do teachers do in the times of grief in their own lives? How do teachers live with grief when experienced by students in their class? How may grief influence the relationships that exist between educators and students? How do the relationships that exist between educators and students influence the grief we live with?

I hope that you, as a reader, gain insight into how all our experiences affect us as teachers, and have the courage to reflect upon all the lives lived in and outside of school. You, dear reader, are

just as great a part of this story as its telling and journey (Gadamer, 2006). Take this story, “it’s yours. Do with it what you will. Cry over it. Get angry. Forget it. But don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (King, 2003, p. 119). I continue to dwell in this story.

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