

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

A métissage of poetry, pedagogy, and writing with children.

by

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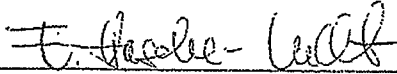
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "A métissage of poetry, pedagogy, and writing with children" submitted by Collette Quinn-Hall in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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Abstract

This thesis is an interpretive study into the relationship between poetics and experience. Drawing on Gadamer's (1975/2004) hermeneutical claim that "every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid", this research examines lived experience through a métissage of narrative and lyrical pedagogic events to explore the idea that poetry is a way of knowing for learners. The work attempts to address poetry as a linguistic liminal shifting space for conjuring the possible between coming to understand and what will always remain outside understanding. This philosophical inquiry embraces the notion that tracks left behind, in this case words, provide a space for recursion and reflection that occur when re-membering the past and the present, the particular and the general, the part and the whole, and the self in the world. It is a pedagogic exploration into what might be possible when we read and write together and allow the living world to enter the stories we tell.

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I wish to thank my family who patiently waited for late night dinners and tirelessly listened to endless iterations of linguistic journeys and never stopped encouraging me to continue my studies.

Finally, I need to thank the students I walk alongside across educational landscapes. They are poetry. They are stories singing to me and interrupting the solidification of a languaged world. They help to widen the crack to let the light in.

Dedication

After my parents died, I kept thinking there was something important I was supposed to do, something I wasn't remembering. I recall the Toronto subway rides my mother would take my sisters and I on every weekend through the summer to the museum or to the island or to walk the open markets of 1960's Yorkville. I have a particularly brilliant memory of an afternoon my father screeched through a red light in pursuit of a blue pick up truck that had swerved into his driving lane, barely missing the green, fast-back, two-door GTO packed with four frightened little girls sardined across the leather back seat.

But the feeling I have that I am forgetting something important remains with me even now and years after their passing, I still seek relief from apposite discomfort. What I do know is that for both my parents, our family and the stories we told each other where of vital importance. The stories kept us close and laughing and loving and so I dedicate these stories to my mother and father in gratitude for all their tales.

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*Through Mercator's lens
Columbus dances the
flamenco*

*With Isabella held
on solid decks
sleep between his eyes*

*In the bowels of a starbound ship
paused within the universe
adrift amongst star-mapped clusters
Costa draws chameleon charts
dreams of wanton wanderings*

*Laying down ghostly lines and wobbly grids
filling empty parchment
tautly stretched across
infinite starscapes
Unfolding distant names
new to the tongue*

*Siren constellations
seeping through portals
folding in on darkening
space seas.
of un-named, un-known restless possibilities*

Aboard A Yellow Bus

Reader, I want you join me in "a room of one's own" (Woolfe, 1927, p. 4) for a constellation of stories and events; a constellation that emerges as an inquiry of linguistic intersection and embrace. So let's begin with the Story of the Yellow Bus.

The yellow school bus slowed down to meet the road cut between two hills covered in poplar and aspen and evergreen trees; the branches reaching out to each other like secret friends whispering an alert to the intrusion to rustled sunbathing. Inside the yellow bus children chattered and laughed, collected and organized, layered, cloaked and zipped up. The air was abuzz with busy anticipation and an excitement that trails along

school escapes from the institutional walls of expectations and curricular outcomes. Each child began to check that deep in their backpacks were the cartographic writing tools that they would need to take notice of the world they were about to experience, the familiar foreign landscape they had come to explore. Some of the children had traveled to Fish Creek Park before; they had picnics with their families or walked with parents and dogs along some of the twenty-two kilometres of pathways that track throughout the river valley. Most of the children were unaware this oasis is nestled in the southern suburbs of Calgary. All of the children were prepared to use their notebooks and pencils to record the images, the shapes, the textures, the skin prickles, the sounds and the smells they would encounter as they attempted to “return to [their] senses” (Abrams, 1996 p. 65).

This intertwined web of experience is...the “life-world” [Husserl’s allusion]...yet now the life-world has been disclosed as a profoundly *carnal* field, as this very dimension of smells and tastes and chirping rhythms warmed by the sun and shivering with seeds. (Abrams, 1996, p. 65)

Nicene Creed of a Poet

*I believe in one matter-energy,
the maker of things seen and unseen.*

*I believe that this pluriverse
is traversed by heterogeneities that are
continually doing things.*

*I believe it is wrong to deny vitality
to nonhuman bodies, forces, and forms,
and that a careful course of anthropomorphization
can help reveal that vitality,
even though it resists full translation
and exceeds my comprehensive grasp.*

*I believe that encounters with lively
non materiality of all that is,
expose a wider distribution of agency,
and reshape the self and its interests.*

(Jane Bennett, 2010 p. 122)



Reader, do you see the woman sitting by the window near the front of the bus? That woman is a teacher and as she gazes out the window at the picnic site the bus is pulling into, she is also attending to the children vibrating and shifting in their seats. Can you try to imagine what she is thinking? Do you think that she is aware this event will prove to be a space of return for her to while away in (Jardine in Jardine, Friesen & Clifford, 2008)? Watch the teacher looking out the window of the bus as it turns into the family picnic site that would become a home base for the excursion. She may be wondering about how she arrived at this location. She may be questioning how she came to share in this journey with these children. She may be marveling at how collectively eager the children appear to be to take out their notebooks and pencils and draw and trace the space they were stepping into.

Probably not. My guess is that she was more concerned with the shower of rain that fell in the morning beading benches where they were to gather together with droplets

of water. I believe she is more concerned with the boy who is telling her his lunch bag is now sitting on his desk back at school. No, her presence is taken up in these moments of teaching and learning with these children. It is only now in these pages that you, reader, are sifting through that her story begins to unfold and rewind and entwine amid other stories. Only now in these pages does she reflect back on the events and read over the notebooks from previous years, and become curiouser and curiouser, like Alice in Wonderland falling into new landscapes. Only as she wrote the words collected between these bindings does she begin to understand what events and processes were put into play and are in play every day as she experiences and comes to understand the world she lives in. Reader, you will hear her telling stories. Stories stitched and patched together in an attempt to tell someone of what she is coming to understand about cognition and perception and recursive visits to those recorded sites bound in the notebooks. She is telling you, dear reader, some stories within stories, within more stories, of her experiences with these children, the ruptured culture of education, her riparian world and the cacophony of voices that sing in her head, and poetry she writes.

Reader, listen to the story of this teacher/researcher and hear the struggle to understand these events; that unfold through time within these pages but are experienced as recursive visitations.

These stories, this inquiry begins, ends and lives within the contextual refrains of questions. How do we come to understand some thing? What do I understand to be cognition? What do educators mean when we talk about knowledge? How is my perception of reality shaped as it is being shaped? What implications do these notions have on the work and the world that I share with the children in my classroom? What implication does a shifted perception have on our shared returns to topics within disciplines? What implications does an anewed (Arendt, 1969) perception hold for how we engage with topics within disciplines? What does all this imply for teachers who are asked to interpret and assess children's writing for their skills and knowledge and understanding? How do our "shared horizons" emerge in a "new kind of global dialogue regarding sustainable human futures" (Smith, 2009, p. 380)? How might intersecting

stories uncover “cultural and environmental commons” (Bowers, 2006, p. 400) under assault from neo-liberal market economies of consumers? What role should educators take up to engender agency in students to un-dress an ethnocentric worldview and re-dress their perceptions in cloaks of localized, contextual assemblages of understandings?

The novelist Thomas King (2003) writes that “[t]he truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2). In the first of his CBC Massy Lectures, he quotes Okanagan storyteller Jeannette Armstrong,

Through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I’m not the only one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language’s stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns.
(p. 2)

Stories converge in assemblages of possibility. We respond to other stories when they resonate with our story and we hearken to stories that interrupt our story. Maybe stories enable us to experience ‘things like this’ or a *thisness* or a ‘setting of things side-by-side’ until we recognize the similarity or reshape our understanding (Zwicky, 2003).

Ontological attention is a response to particularity, *this* porch, *this* laundry basket, *this* day. Its object cannot be substituted for even when it is an object of considerable generality (‘the country’, ‘cheese’, ‘garage sales’). It is the antithesis of the attitude that regards things as ‘resources’, mere means to human ends. In perceiving *thisness*, we respond to having been addressed (In fact, we are addressed all the time, but we don’t always notice this.) (Zwicky, 2003, p. 52)

Stories have a way of insinuating themselves into our conversations with each other and our self-dialogues. Stories weave sticky tendrils throughout our notions of how the world exists around us and how we are fastened within the world.

Reader, come back to the story of the yellow bus. The bus has not yet left the school and the children are preparing to gather together to start their journey. Stand at the door of a classroom and tune-in to the buzzing and vibrant music rattling between the walls. Do you see that boy stretched out on the carpet, he has a story to tell.

Laying on his stomach, propped up on elbows, his hands cupping his chin, Damian scans the open newspaper laid out on the carpet. He is looking for the article that he will clip out and pin to the current news board blocked out on the wall beside the classroom door. He has acquired the position of news hunter after an argumentative scene entitled *Why do I have to read this shit all the time?* This was one of many heated scenes Damian had starred in during his educational drama with numerous authoritative antagonists; *Damian versus the teacher, Damian versus the principal, Damian versus the lunchroom attendant, Damian versus the crosswalk patroller; Damian versus the kid who just wanted to hang his coat on the hook he had used the day before and did not understand the Damian-rotation rule;* every kid needs to move one hook to the right of the hook used the day before, except for Damian because he made the rule. And, so after many discussions about reading in a classroom, Damian has the position of news hunter gathering interesting stories from around the world and in our community. He diligently reads the articles that capture his imagination, takes in minute details and retells his filtered facts to his classmates.

Damian gathers the sheets of articles into a pile and deposits them in the bin on his desk. He picks up his backpack and bounces to the line of students getting ready to board the yellow bus to Fish Creek Park. He pokes one of the boys he is partnered with and they all laugh at the funny face he pulls. Behind him stands the adult support worker who will be his 'watcher' on this excursion, a requirement insisted upon by the school administration whenever a 'Bridges' kid leaves the premises. Damian is a Bridges student, coded by our school board as a kid with behavioural issues. The 'Bridges Program' is a Calgary Board of Education (CBE) program to "help students overcome challenging emotional and behavioural issues" (Trustee-zine, 2009). In the pages of his file, Damian exhibits oppositional deviance, he has been aggressive, and he has been verbally abusive. All of these behaviours landed him with a 'code for behaviour' and in a bridges program designed to 'modify his behaviour' so he could be released from the 'code' and integrated back in to a 'regular' classroom program. In most school settings, Damian would be placed with a group of six or eight students isolated in a separated

classroom. However, at the present school his 'behaviour modification' happens amidst our classroom and alongside our students.

Part of the process of 'housing' Damian, the Bridges student, in a classroom, included a meeting with Damian's family. In the weeks leading up to our fall return to school, I sat in a room with his grandmother and a brother, the principal of our school, the administrator for special programs, and this dark, curly-haired, powerful entity whose raucous, academic story was written in a file six-inches thick. Those file pages documented evidence of an articulate boy who hated just about everything to do with formal schooling, in particular, reading and writing. But those file pages did not tell the story of a boy raised by a grandmother in a home of violence and escape; a mother never spoken of and a father incarcerated for some hidden crime. Nor did the pages tell of this young gatherer of information who could remember details of old events and conversations demonstrated by his abrupt interruptions and gestures to errors and omissions in the stories told by the adults around the table. Distracted by the file on the table and the words of the 'experts' and the angry, dismissive gaze emanating from this little boy's eyes, I didn't notice he had must have been playing with something in his hands during our discussions. Had I not left my pens behind in the meeting room, I would not have returned to find a small stone on the table where Damian had been sitting. It was one stone of thousands found on a playground or along a river's edge. It was merely grey. It was only a little part of the earth, not much to see. I picked it up and held in my hand. The stone was still warm. There were some raised etchings traced along the smooth belly of this offering, unreadable and unremarkable. "What do I see?" I asked, but the stone did not answer.

The first three weeks of school were bumpy. Damian was like yoyos wound too tight and when he sprang there were erratic fits and starts and stumbles along the way. There were many confrontations and long-after school discussions trying help this boy find his way in the classroom and shifting and shaping the classroom to fit this boy. And, slowly his volcanic eruptions began to subside and sporadically he began to find a way to tell his story.

Once when painting landscapes, I settled in beside him as he sketched out an image of a river with a whale-sized fish leaping from a wave. I was puzzled because around the room were large colourful copies of Canadian landscape paintings by Thompson, Harris, Jackson and Carr. His classmates were creating re-imagined natural spaces drawn from these images. Here before Damian was this big aquatic vertebrate absent from the others pictures. We began talking about the process, the choice of colour, re-printed paintings he found appealing, natural landscapes he had visited. Somewhere in the conversation I asked about the fish and why it held such a prominent space in his drawing. His compact shelled body appeared to jell and a wistful sigh sounded from his throat but he only hinted to a day spent fishing on the Bow River with his father. The moment of reveal was brief and quickly recovered in a forceful return to stroking out the river in thick pencil markings, but for that moment he was transported and transformed.

*Extraordinary ordinary happenings
in the garden*

Imagine

*A fledgling bird prematurely
bereft of a nest*

*Hops a scripted alarm across
our wooden deck*

*Pillaging crows cruise
from tree top to roof top*

Above

Below

*Sonorous sparrows swoop
to the fence*

perform birdsong sonatas

Intertwined whistle tunes

Transferred tales from Jurassic forebearers

Evolutionary avian storylines

Of flight translations

*The next morning the little bird
joined the fence post choir.*

*Extraordinary ordinary happenings
in the garden*

Kaleidoscopic Windows on a Yellow Bus

Reader, here is another story being told by a teacher. Here is another story unraveling in an inquiry into past events laid beside the whispers of colleagues and ancestors and interrupted by other voices. Events revisited along refractive waves and through recursive lenses.

I often have an image playing in my head of worlds dancing together. I believe it is a shadow impressed upon my mind after reading a speculative fiction series by Doris Lessing, *Canopsis in Argos: Archives*. In the series of seven books published over ten years, Lessing creates anthropomorphized planets actively involved in the progressing stories of the characters. System theorists present images of living worlds within worlds, within worlds engaged in an oscillating dance at times in balance, at times out of step, circling and drifting within each other's zones. These living worlds exist from the sub-atomic to the expanding universe and they are all co-originated by the dancers (Capra, 1996). In language we enact these worlds. We can tell the story of the Big Bang. We can tell the story of the emergence of a self-organizing concept. We can tell the story of autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1992) and the evolving cell. Each story enacts the world that nurtures the characters in the story. The stories that are told in these pages and the poetry interrupting the narrative enact the perceived world of writing with children as we experienced together. But even this story is nestled within other stories that you will not hear because those stories call out for bigger spaces or they are stories unknown. To speak to you in story and in poetry affirms a belief that linguistic exchanges are expressive and poetic; meaning and understanding is a resonating embodied experience that remains sourced within particular moments and in the present. Poetry and story are irreverent to time. Poetry and story are narrative devices that are imagistic knowing (Steward, 2010) and provide moments of punctuated and aerated thought. And to speak to you in poetry and story alludes to what remains unknown, it is a way "into the presence of the numinous" (Lilburn, 1999, p. 17). Language is alive in all that is worldly.

Language as a bodily phenomenon accrues to all expressive bodies not just to the human. Our own speaking, then, does not set us outside of the animate landscape but – whether or not we are aware of it – inscribes us more fully in its chattering, whispering, soundful depths. (Abrams, 1996, 80)

*Oh Hermes
You trickster
You lyrical midwife
Strung translated moon shine
across a tortoise shell
You birthed vibrating matter
into the world
Resonant resistor to
a soliton wave
You'd rather raise
reverberations
To find patterns midst
the aporia
of the
teacher/researcher/poet
Diving through
collateral learnings*

This writing is a métissage, a braiding of three voices. A métissage is a bricolage, a ‘stone’ soup, a bit of this and bit of that. The métissage is what writer Salman Rushdie (1991) has called a “love song to our mongrel selves” (p. 394). Métissage is assembled from the Greek myth of Métis who was the first love of Zeus and mother to Athena, the goddess of arts and wisdom. Métis was a wise and intelligent shapeshifter, who took on various guises to trick Zeus and diffuse his power (Astma, 2011). Métissage is assembled from the Latin word *mixticius*, meaning mixed. In *Life Writing* (2009) the weaving writers Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers and Leggo cobble the word metissage from the threads of its meaning in weaving a cloth from different fibres, and then they have weaved a word that “through its genealogy of magical cunning (from Greek) and mixing (from Latin)”, emerges to tell a tale that is “multi-valenced, metonymic, and multi-textured”(p. 35) and “unravels the logic of linearity, hierarchy, and uniformity” (p. 35).

These writers métissage their curriculum stories through autobiography, poetry, photographs and rumination to “blur genres, texts and identities within and across topos or topic, to see cross-cultural, egalitarian relations of knowing and being within and across disciplines” (p. 37). A métissage provides the “hybrid space” (Trinh Minh-ha cited in Aoki, 2003) or “middle way” (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991) for language to perform in.

Performing a métissage of texts, either in print, electronic format, or in a live performance, is a singular and collective act of re-creation. In performing our subjectivities we assert the relevance, the legitimacy, indeed the necessity of including the full range of our humanness in our work of re/membering ourselves in/to the world, embracing the world, with all our relations. (Husebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009, p. 10)

These written words present a métissage of three voices, the voice of the intrusive narrator, the voice of the teacher/researcher, and the voice of the poet. Each voice wraps the narrative they spell around narratives of other tellers. Each story is present and temporal and held in a collection of words. Each story is looking towards the same horizon; writing with children. And, each narrative whispers to what is still left hidden in the shadows. Together, all the narratives open new spaces for interpretation; spaces between each of the narratives and spaces between the braided narratives and the reader.

The intrusive narrator is a literary device that has been used in novels as far back as the eighteenth and nineteenth century. A moralizing, overseeing narrator was used by novelists such as George Eliot and Charlotte Bronte, the latter’s “dear reader” is addressed in the novel *Jane Eyre*. For some time the intrusive narrator was dismissed in novels because critics claimed it separated the reader from the story, but I have noticed a resurgence of the device in the novels of contemporary writers like Zadie Smith and Salman Rushdie. In his 2006 novel *The Book Thief*, Markus Zusak’s intrusive narrator turns up as the character of death weaving his part of the tale into those of the characters’ actions in the story. In this writing, I have called on the intrusive narrator to draw the reader’s attention to the events of the past. This ‘omniscient’ speaker shapes the telling

with ironic objectivity. While gesturing to the *flânerie* of the objective sightseer, this narrator draws attention to the embodied subjectivity of the teacher/researcher in the 'educational' stories being told in the pages. And, like Virginia Woolf (1957) "I am afraid it will not be taken seriously... You feel the creature arching its back & galloping on, though as usual much is water & flimsy & pitched in too high a voice" (p. vii). I hope the intrusive narrator will serve to save the writer from attempting to tell the past by falling into the story of 'an individualized me'. The interruptive voice of the narrator reminds the reader/writer that the children are envisioned as co-conspirators in this inquiry and *métissaged* writers within the narrative.

The teacher/researcher voice is who I am in this inquiry. Teacher/researcher is the one I have come to understand I am; I have been a teacher/researcher since the beginning of this career. But it is only recently that I shifted my position from one of teacher-as-researcher to the metonymed teacher/researcher. As teacher-as-researcher I spent many career years watching and recording the actions of the students I worked with in the belief I could get the picture exactly correct. Once I held the 'correct' picture, I could find the teaching procedure that would easily fit the chosen learning outcome. I could uncover in myriad texts of teaching reading, teaching writing, teaching mathematics and locate the teaching procedure that best fit the group of students in my class. If I recorded careful objective observations I would be able to scientifically apply the response-based intervention to ensure the success of every student. Something in my understanding has shifted. I find myself a teacher/researcher caught up in the dance of *theoria*, *praxis*, and *poesis*.

Theoria, *praxis*, and *poesis*, are three forms of thought introduced by Socrates, redefined by Plato and reconciled by Aristotle, conjuring up the notions of contemplation, action and creation. In the role of a/r/tographer, Irwin (2004) resurrects these ancient Greek forms translating and interweaving the words into theory/research, teaching/learning and art/making. Irwin drew my attention to the space that opens up between these forms of thought when one is no longer "embraced" over the other and all

are perceived in a “multi-dilectical view that encourages thirdness” (Irwin & Cosson, 2004, p. 28).

If we conceive of researching, teaching, and art making as activities that weave in and through one another – an interweaving and intraweaving of concepts, activities, and feelings – we are creating fabrics of similarity and difference. In these interlingual acts, there is at once an acceptance of playing with particular categories and a refusal to be aligned with any one category. Where two would be inclined to dialogic opposition, a third space offers a point of convergence – yet respect for divergence – where differences and similarities are woven together. (pp. 28-29)

I find the image of *theoria*, *praxis* and *poesis* interweaving and converging enchanting. I recognize *poesis* is enacted in the poetic words that shape my written *praxis* of engaging with *theoria*. However, I am cautiously aware of how easy it would be to believe these pieces of creative writing are singular events arising from my personal genesis.

Questions are always circling how to embed the world within my words and my words within the world and how to language in ways to erase the demarcation between the worlds and words.

The poet presents the tension the lies between words and worlds. The poems gesture to what I understand and what I am coming to understand. The poet speaks to the shimmering after-burn images that linger in the advents of interruptions. I write poetry to try to unravel understandings about the world I engage in. Sometimes when I come to the end of a poem, I can say, “Oh, that’s what that was about”. Many times I come to the end of a poem and I can only say, “Oh.” And sometimes I come to the end of poem and sense there is nothing to be said because a poem is not always about the words. A poem is about the drift or the shift that happens between the words. Maybe like my poems, the poetry of children in this work gesture to those moments when something opens between their stories, their experiences, their understanding, and their writing that only shimmers and shadows; moments that are shapeless yet transforming, precursors to what is to become new or re-newed pathways on their landscapes.

Together the braided three voices in this inquiry, the intrusive narrator, the teacher/researcher, and the poet, comprise a storyteller telling stories of 'as if'. A storyteller telling storied metaphors, living "species of understanding" (Zwicky, 2008, p. 4) speaking of 'if this is me then this is you' and 'if this is you then this is me' simultaneously.

In metaphor we experience a gestalt shift from a distinct intellectual and emotional complex to another "in an instant in time". Metaphor is also a meta-image. It is multiply resonant. (Zwicky, 2008, p. 4)

This is a lyrical inquiry, a marriage between lyrical language and research (Neilson, 2008). Lyrical language is the antithesis of rational, reductionist thought. Lyrical language is taken up in narrative, poetry, fiction, creative non-fiction, drama, monologues, journal entries, and other imaginative ventures. Lyrical language finds it difficult to become the *this-is-how-the-world-is* trope of the language of knowing and the language of knowing has marginalized lyrical language. I am troubled by school demands for saying what is 'true' in well-organized, standard-proofed essays. I am vexed by the conviction the 'truth' of the world or a nation or a religion or a science can be languaged into sentenced-cells behind bars of iron words and argued into reality.

L Lyrical language provides spaces for what Zwicky recognizes as opportunities to "experience" an other "without appropriation, ownership, or reductiveness (Zwicky cited in Neilsen, 2008, p. 95). Rather, it simply takes us to their space. Neilsen (2008) tells us that Lyrical Inquiry is a "phenomenological process and practice that embraces ambiguity, metaphor, recursiveness, silence, sensory immersion and resonance, creating forms of writing that may become art, or may simply create an aesthetic experience of the writer" (p. 101). Impact, in other words, can be achieved with resonance as much as with report (Neilsen, 2008).

Space Between

*There is a glossy alius imposter
peering from the frame at two*

lovers risking misunderstandings
Words spoken
 spiral dance
evoke tiklaalik crawling from the devonian riverbed
where another man now sits opposite
you don't see him but you touched
his flesh when I pointed
him out even when he
kissed you on parched lips
you didn't know he was there
listening to shadowed words taking shape
between the story you tell
 and the story I hear
Burned afterimages slip inside eye shutters
Your voice, his eyes, my hands gather the photo
 place it on the mantel
Eyes watch from above
words whisper down in the stillness
Your voice, his eyes, my hands lay the image
 under plastic collections
eyes bewildered by others
letters dance reality to light
Your voice, his eyes, my hands push the boy
 under river water
saturated transfer tissue
loosened gelatin
counter spectacles of pictures
 dissolve
 exposing tiklaalik

The poetry and stories speak to an event shared with a group of grade six students in an east Calgary school. We were writing and exploring poetry and we were drawing and imagining landscapes different from the city streets and cinder-bricked buildings containing our bodies. We were telling each other the stories of our lives on the blank pages where we wrote and we were drawing our sensorial return to the world on the canvases we painted. We were trying to find a space between the 'curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived' (Aoki, 2003) and trying to attend to a world lost to

peripheral vision (Bateson, 1994) while learning along the way. And in our stories, each one particular to the teller, both familiar and different, we were trying to hear multiple voices singing together while watching and attending to the world's gestures (Abram, 1996) in the same space. Kingwell (2000) in describing the house as a "place to dream" raises the idea of the influence of "third space possibilities" (p. 175), the space between work and home. Maybe what we were trying to reconcile was a 'third space possibility' between the classroom and the wild woods of Fish Creek Park? Maybe we were trying to refocus images of riparian zones of nature and concrete blind to us in the 'everyday' of schooling? Maybe in the polyphonic voices in poems read and the stories told, we were being reminded of a knowing long forgotten?

*No words
Are mine
Only borrowed language
To manipulate
Strip, reshape, redress*

*To be shared again
Enriched and empowered*

*Stolen
From discourse fore bearers
To call meaning*

*Ideas resonant
Sing
The life of thought*

*Breathing in, breathing out
Enfolding and unfolding*

I have wondered if our poetry was/is language that takes up the interpretative space between experience and understanding in this complex dance of living a practice, a practice of living. This is difficult. It is difficult to try to articulate the notion that we are engaged in a living practice. I am taken up by Ted Aoki's (2003) eloquence when he says "curricula-as-live(d)—experiences of teachers and students—a multiplicity of

curricula, as many as there are teachers and students” (p. 2). And, this practice is taken up as theory, understanding and learning, and action. Theory is really just the stories we tell ourselves about the world, about the people in the world around us, about ourselves. King (2008) recites the following story about telling stories about stories.

One time, it was in Trois-Rivières I think, a man in the audience who was taking notes asked about the turtle and the earth. If the earth was on the back of a turtle, what was below the turtle? Another turtle, the story teller told him. And below that turtle? Another turtle. And below that. Another turtle. The man quickly scribbled down notes, enjoying the game, I imagine. So how many turtles are there? he wanted to know. The storyteller shrugged. No one knows for sure, she told him, but it’s turtles all the way down. (p. 13)

The stories are the threads, the in-betweens that keep us afloat in the complex cosmos of whatever social organism we are performing in; our families, our working space, our city, our country. The stories are what we tell ourselves to keep us woven into the fabric of the existence we have enacted with everything around us. Gadamer (2004) tells we are thrown into a world already teeming and steaming with others and so we continually are trying to interpret our relationship within a living world and a living world of our own making. And these multiple stories of all us others living in the world make up a very complex story of no singularity but only intersecting plains of spaces where we might share part of the story; nodal points of intersection or ‘contact zones’ where we might engage in a topic. Multi-perceived horizons (Gadamer, 2004) where we might come together to build a bridge, or agree to ground our kid because she forgot to call to tell us she was not coming home from drinking in the city. Other than rainbowed points of intersection in this woven story of being together, the colours and threads are all very different.

Understanding and learning is interpreted in language. For humans, language is our tool to unravel and reweave these stories, our theories. We are languaged beings. We enact our existence in language. As biological creatures we enact our existence with the world around us. As social beings living in a living world we extend that enaction

through language. And language is complex and ephemeral and dangerously binding. And, language makes for shifts and drifts within our stories, within our theories of the world. Language can imprison us with a 'truth', deliver us to one 'true' story we tell and tell again to the demise and horror of the ones who don't know the story or don't care about the story or don't agree with the story. We can become isolated and caged within the words of 'absolute' methods and technical descriptions of 'the way things are'. Many a horrific event has been and continues to be perpetuated because of adherence to 'one story'.

Language is the way we have interpreted our stories to inform our actions or inactions. What we do in the living world can either hold our stories firm or reveal the fissures, the bare threads or frayed binding in our stories causing us to try to interpret something anew (Arendt, 1969). Plunging into an event or a statement or an email from an educator, can put us consciously back in circling steps of the practice dance (*think Safety Dance by Men Without Hats*). Trying to understand can have us seeking other arrangements of language to try to catch our relationship with the world and the other within it.

*Ah, not be cut off,
Not through the slightest partition
Shut out from the law of the stars.
The inner - what is it?
If not intensified sky,
Hurled through with birds and deep
With the winds of homecoming.
Rainer Maria Rilke*

The 'doing' of living can have us retelling our stories differently. It's a circle dance, the practice dance; it is the dance of theory, of understanding and learning, of doing. It is the dance of theoria, praxis, and poesis. But, it's more complex than just a circle dance. Our dances have a culture and a history of their own guiding the steps. There are dosados and pirouettes; there are partner exchanges and concentric circles. There are tunnel prances, and figure eights and a lot of free-styling. And there is

remembering dance is also performed on the earth and an awareness that the dancers need to be mindful of where bodies touch the ground (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009). Dancers need to note the sensations arising between the bodies of each of the dancers as well as the sensations that arise between the dancers' feet and the earth on which they dance.

Here is the space for writing; a creative poesis, a way to understand something is to write it. In a textual world this make sense. It makes sense that writing and reading need to be taken up together because reading and writing provide spaces for interpreting together. Reading and writing provide nodal points where we may all talk to some thing, interpret together some thing; gaze at a horizon. In writing we can concretize the speak so it becomes a point of intersection. In reading we can each re-visit the written space re-formed anew (Arendt, 1969); re-writing the space each time we return. These points of intersection can be between us and the world, or us and another or between our selves and our selves. These points of intersection are spaces for recursion, reflection and renewed interpretations to feed back into the practice dance and possibly shift the con-joined steps or consolidate the moves. It appears we are always in the social nodals but there needs to be spaces to interpret individually in order to affect our personal stories, our relations with the world, and with others. And this is in writing.

Writing has the ability to be open to shifts and drifts but poetry is about shifts and drifts. Poetry is a capacious medium; it holds with "plurality" as the condition of humanity "because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives or will live" (Arendt, 1958, p. 8). In poetry we can engage in "transformation into a communion, in which we do not remain what we were" (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 341). In those nodal spaces of writing I can ask how do educators read the *blues* of our students? How do educators read the wonder of our students? How do we hear their loss or joy as different and similar to ours? I want to understand more of how to listen to other stories and mine as they intertwine. Poetry denies the binary thinking of this or that and of either, or. Poetry gestures to the possible and beckons the reader/re-writer of the poem to hear the 'and'.

Reader, come once again to the story of the Yellow Bus.

*Water crashes
Against the
Cliffs like clouds
Crashing into each other
Rocks crumble
Down the hills
Fish jump between waves
Singing love songs
Far across the lake.*

See our boy crouched beside an eddy, captured between a fallen tree and the riverbank. He is scooping up minnows in the cup of his hands and carefully placing them back into the flow of the Bow's currents. You can see his pockets bulging with the small, plain stones he has collected along the pathway. Each stone is an unremarkable mystery.

So this is a hermeneutic inquiry as a teacher asking the question where is the living pedagogy located (Aoki, 2003)? This is a narrative about writing/poetry landscapes mapping their ways into classrooms. And, like Dr. Gregory, cited by Aoki (2003), I am more interested in the discourse of poetry/writing than in the discipline of poetry/writing.

Writing On the Yellow Bus

Reader, it is time to come back to the yellow bus...

Surrounded by his pack of pals, Joey clamps his hand on his toque and punches the arm of the kid laughing beside him. The boys in this gathering have already packed up what they will take on the excursion on the yellow bus and have positioned themselves as close to the classroom door as possible. They know that if they are the first on the bus then they can claim the coveted back seat. Ensconced in those back rows of diesel benches, they will experience the bumps and rolls of the road and maybe get a chance to howl at the cars on the highway. The opportunities to 'live free' are fleeting. Joey and the boys will try to slip into the cracks between bus rules and

excursion etiquette to etch out some 'we got away with it' pleasure.

By grade five Joey had already decided that he was not a writer. He drove into any piece of literature about all-terrain vehicles. He scanned the morning newspaper for articles on his favourite hockey hero. He attentively listened to the stories read out loud to him. But, he would not write. And then, a few months into an exploration of poetry and the work of the Group of Seven, Joey composed *Darkness Rolling* to sit alongside his acrylic landscape painting at a school-based art show.

*Darkness rolling
Over the sky.
Like spilled ink.
Dead forest mist
Drifting
Like winter's sheet.
The trees
Crackling down
As blackness crowns
The silence of the forest.*

What allowed Joey to let go of what he knew about himself? What reflective response opened up the space to help him to generate these words and shape them into the poem?

Poets make things, but they don't make poetry; poetry is present to begin with; it is there, and poets answer it if they can. The poem is the trace of the poet's joining in knowing. (Bringhurst, 2007)

In elementary classrooms literacy is always at the forefront. Educators use the word literacy when talking to the programming that will be taken up in the classroom. The traditional definition of literacy has been the ability to read and write. In the New World Encyclopedia, the notion of literacy has evolved to reflect its very complex nature in our language world.

Literacy is usually defined as the ability to read and write, or the ability to use language to read, write, listen, and speak. In modern contexts, the word refers to reading and writing at a level adequate for communication, or at a level that lets one understand and communicate ideas in a literate society, so as to take part in

that society. Literacy can also refer to proficiency in a number of fields, such as art or physical activity. (New World Encyclopedia)

And, I wonder if the integrated and complex (word and world) wor(l)d of literacy has somehow broken apart in the classrooms of Canadian schools and whether reading has come to mean literacy? I wonder if speaking of literacy we have shaved away at the complex living language we engage in every day in order to control the wor(l)d and lock language into the boxes of knowledge we parse out over the course of a school day. I wonder about empowering reading as literacy because in early education teachers emphasize reading as literacy. Educators program guided reading, we program reading aloud to young children, we provide book bags to parents for home reading and we assess (sometimes to access) reading levels with myriad tools. Writing has a place in conventional writing skills; when a child is ready to report on a frog, or write a story for an exam, or learn the format of a diamante poem, we are ready with practical writing tools to hand over to the children to etch away at the proper forms of writing. I wonder about the text as a site of knowledge when I listen to the lament of junior- and high-school teachers as they scramble for time to get their students 'through the textbook' before the end of the year. I wonder at the text as 'the word' in knowing as I witness the seeking teachers perusing Calgary's Teacher Convention floor for the best guide in 'how-to' teach poetry to the Grade 11 students. I wonder if, although educators agree that reading and writing share the same living space, they really only think reading when they think about literacy and we only think literacy when we think about language.

Reader, I draw gaze to a window into the atomized classroom of a program steeped in the language of balanced literacy.

You will notice the desks are arranged in small clusters throughout the room. You will be intrigued by the silence and the purposeful actions of the young readers attending to their particular task. There are more than the usual number of adults in the room because for the next two hours every adult in the school as been 'called to action' under the banner of Balanced Literacy. Each adult in the room leads a small group of children in a guided literacy activity. Groups of children circle one adult holding the

picture book that they are sharing together. The adult hands them yellow post-it notes with words written in blue ink. The children set about matching the word on their singular post-it note to a word in their reading book. One group of children sits before an easel of chart paper. On the large lined paper before them is a list of events foreshadowing what is to come in the story they are about to read together. Another group of children are before a SMART board. The adult has written two headings on the top of the SMART screen and one child is called upon to sort one of the many words scattered across the bottom of the screen under one of the two headings.

If you set your gaze along the bank of shelves that span across the windowed wall you will notice rows of red bins filled with trade and picture books meticulously sorted, ordered and labeled by reading levels from AA to Z. Each book is identified and measured against the standards set out in the Fontas and Pinnell (2001) reading guide correlated to the Fontas and Pinnell (2001) reading assessment tools that during the year the teacher will use to test and label her readers. The children who are not engaged with a teacher directly in the classroom are scattered around the room sitting in their desks with their eyes directed towards the books in their hands. One adult is free from working with groups of children to remind the 'independent' readers to stay on task and focus on their reading. One child stands before a red bin labeled D. She knows that she is a D reader and that from this bin she can 'freely' choose her own reading material. Some of the children at their desks have plastic zip-lock baggies containing two or three books all matching the lettered label on the outside of their reading bag. Many have read the books inside their bag several times and are prepared to read these stories to a partner or to another adult. There is a very hive-like busyness about the room. An intentioned purposefulness that emanates from the assembly of readers and adult-guides that feels processed and sterile.

Maybe, my observant reader, you are beginning to notice throughout the two hours you have been peering into the room you have not seen a pencil used for anything other than recording words or the number of pages read. Maybe you are beginning to wonder about when a child could open a notebook and write to the ideas books before her

generate. Maybe you are wondering how a child might respond to something startling him in a story or a collection of words causing his heart to skip. But wait, shift your gaze to today's agenda outlined on the calendar by the SMART board and you will see writing will not occur until the afternoon. There is a half an hour planned for writing at 1:30.

Reader, the Teacher/Researcher is back...

I wonder if something has gone amiss in forgetting about writing's relationship to reading given we are languaged beings; beings who shape our world through language. And I wonder if as educators we have let go of a powerful reflective space to interpret the world. Zwicky (2004) reminds us "all that confronts us is the world, gesturing at us" (p. 114). Zwicky tells of "patterns" in the world, "of which our thinking is a part" (p. 114). We can be at home (Lilburn, 1999) in the world because it feels good to experience the patterns in the world and we experience these patterns in words. Recognizing the patterns in the world and experiencing these patterns, reminds us of our presence in a living ecology: it is one way of coming home.

Travel across

imaginary earthscapes

extend experience, invert failure

Dispossessed of assumptions

perception walks barefoot

between tree-lined lashes

To linger in dew drops trapped

in purple irises

Geographies of children

stretch toward the sun

Unhitched by springs possibility

voices unfurl brazen-mouthed

Green beneath black soil

furrowed into wailing terrains

still clutching hold

to rhizoidic navigations

*Wayfinding trendrills wrap around
contact zones
bending deep
To nurture ambiguous contours
eroded into orienting compass
rose petaled pathways.*

I want to spend a little time unraveling a story of writing as a space to interpret the world. Like the poet philosopher Bringhurst (2006), I have to begin by asking the question “what is language” (p. 10)? Bringhurst hints at a complex and living language when he writes language,

is what speaks us as well as what we speak. Through our neurons, genes and gestures, shared assumptions and personal quirks, we are spoken by and speak many languages each day, interacting with ourselves, with one another, other species, and the objects — natural and man-made — that populate our world. Even in silence, there is no complete escape from the world of symbols, grammar and signs. (p. 10)

Reading and writing are particles of the solid forms of language Bringhurst alludes to. And they are particles that only exist because they live in language and language is alive in the world.

In *A History of Reading*, Alberto Manguel (1996) outlines the development of the solid form of language from the tallying sheets of the Egyptian builders and sellers in the markets to the production of liberating texts by the printing presses. Prior to the written recording of the Homeric tales (Abrams, 1996, p. 107) our languaged world was taken up in oral stories. Language was held in memory, shared across the fire, or between the arms of mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers. Oral language is an ephemerally flowing form of language. Oral language is literacy on wings and interpreted in the words that sail between the teller and the listener. Sini (in Massimo & Burch, 2002) cautions us not to think only of the historical appearance of writing as a “technical device” rather to hearken to the “complete change” in our languaging “habit and practice” (p. 16).

First of all, what was fluid, ever changing, dependent on inspiration, subject to place and time contingencies, as well as on the highly innovative and creative transience of oral memory, was fixed in a stationary mould, which has been kept comparatively constant ever since. (Sini in Massimo & Burch, 2002, p. 16)

This is a difficult space to go back to, to reflect on, to write about. While transforming our oral tellings into a written solid form (Bringhurst, 2002) we silenced our first-familial tie to language. In shaping the 'golem' of language, the walking breathing solid body of writing modeled out of the clay of language, we profoundly shifted the way we know ourselves in the world and how we come to recognize each other. How the listeners of Homer's tales knew the world could not longer exist for the philosophizing omnipotent thinker. With each tablet raised or parchment rolled, we strained the connective tissue that held our bones within the earth until the desire to unveil the ineffable snapped the tenuous attachments and our bones were scattered to rattle in pages of books.

In *Between Philosophy and Poetry* (2009), Sini tells of three particular effects of the solidification of oral language into written words. "First of all, writing isolates meaning from its original context of life, from the gesture of the living word experienced in concrete situations" (p. 17). The spoken word is rooted in bodily experience: the baby who cries in hunger, a genealogical bonding of a people, or etchings of food systems by elders. Transposing words breathed to the listener into words visible on a page, "the Greek scribes effectively dissolved the primordial power of air" (Abrams, 1996, p. 252) and began the distancing of western humanity from the earth.

"Secondly, only the practice of writing made it possible to improve the techniques of arguing, refuting, and demonstrating, techniques subject to objective and intersubjective control" (Sini, 2002, p. 18). Plains of writing provided by written pages are recursive spaces of return. Language can be adapted and modified to better express an idea. Language can be repeated and replicated and provide a process by which 'good' ideas can be disseminated to many listeners/readers. Words can be shaped and

manipulated to pare away at any doubt that the idea the orator tells to the listener/reader is the 'one true story'.

Thirdly, alphabetic practice, by generating the autonomous nature of logical truth, that is, the exact and homogeneous sense of speech, produces the very idea of reality. Here, the habit of telling the truth is not opposed to that of lying, but it turns into the ability of reproducing the same thing in a correct form. (p. 18)

Over time, through the assemblage of words in the "correct form" western humanity enacted a world dominated by objective reality where every glimmer of awe could be analyzed and controlled. And if something cannot be identified, codified and controlled by 'good' ideas, then 'the unknown' is either 'out of our hands' and in the realm of god or 'in our hands' in creative arts. Into whichever space the western thinker tosses the ineffable, what cannot be known, what could be possible, or remains ambiguous, can't get in the way of a 'good idea'.

But, the story of how we live in the world is not really a single solid line. The story is not closed. The story is perforated; it has holes into which the world's breath can whisper through. Our stories are globally rhizoidic stories that shift and drift within the liminal spaces enacted between the words and the listener or the words and the reader and their particular experiences amid the living world.

We can speculate on this notion of language possessing a 'poetic' existence; of language being taken up in stories that remain netted and relational with spaces for other possibilities. Davis (2009) draws our attention to cultures around the world that hint at how our ancestors may have generated oral stories to exchange with each other when foraging into the land. Stories predicated on symbolic representation of natural phenomena. In *The Wayfinders*, Davis' 2009 Massey Lectures, he tells of the "Peoples of the Anaconda" living in the South American forests of Piraparana for whom "the entire natural world is saturated with meaning and cosmological significance" (p. 108). Davis speaks of the cultures of peoples like the Barasana, who have struggled to avoid the assault of western colonization by adapting and protecting their cultural identity rooted along banks of the Amazon river. He suggests that in listening to their stories "we can

glimpse something of the beliefs and convictions that allowed untold millions” (p. 115) to live in the world before the advent of the ‘solid word’.

There is no separation between nature and culture. Without the forest and the rivers, humans would perish. But without people, the natural world would have no order or meaning. All would be chaos. Thus the norms that drive social behaviour also define the manner in which human beings interact with the wild, the plants and animals, the multiple phenomena of the moon, the scent of a blossom, the sour odour of death. Everything is related, everything connected as a single integrated whole. (p. 109)

Recently, Genevieve von Petzinger, then a researcher in at the University of British Columbia, began to tell a different story about the rock cave drawings of prehistoric France. Pictographic ‘doodles’, covering 25,000 years before the recorded clay tablets of the Mesopotamian ‘accountant’ (Manguel, 1996) were held to be aesthetic cave decorations, hints at the ‘art’ of the ancients. “Compiling a comprehensive database of all recorded cave signs from 146 sites in France” (Ravillious, 2010), Petzinger identified a series of repeated patterns of language seen across thousands of kilometers; signs of humanity’s earliest solid forms of communication. Communication held in a form of ambiguously living images interpreted by ecologies of humanity. Humans applied their lived experiences tethered to geographies, biologies, cosmologies, the blood and the bones of the earth and related their lives in cave drawings of signs; a whole story of some other’s experience captured in an image.

As language began to take on its ‘solid form’ (Bringham, 2008), the whisper of *living in the wor[l]d* continued to seep through the holes in the story. Manguel (2008) speaks of Socrates whose words were recorded by Plato.

To Socrates, the text read was nothing but its words, in which sign and meaning overlapped with bewildered precision. Interpretation, exegesis, gloss, commentary, association, refutation, symbolic and allegorical senses, all rose not from the text itself but from the reader. The text, like a painted picture, said only “the moon of Athens”; it was the reader who furnished it with a full ivory face, a

deep dark sky, a landscape of ancient ruins along which Socrates once walked. (p. 59)

I have to re-member, re-collect, re-assemble, the knowing that for Socrates language existed only in its oral form. Not until Plato were the words of Socrates recorded for others to read. Manguel (2008) is alluding to something, to a shift in the relationship of teller and told to the reader and read; this carrying of a sensual connection to the words as breath upon the listener and the evanescent nature of words into air to be breathed in by the listener and shifted into something anew (Arendt, 1969). Somehow these *wor[l]ds* deny our modern, economic notions of the 'correct' words empowering and controlling what is known in the world.

Illich (1993) explicates the embodied nature of the word in his book *In the Vineyard of the Text*. In telling the story of Hugh of St. Victor's medieval book on the art of reading, Illich outlines a monastic life spent in translating spoken memory into pages of living text. This first technological shift in writing in twelfth-century Europe, retained the living breath of an oral tradition. In their 'infallible' search for wisdom, the *studium legendi*, the vocation of those who seek to advance their learning, recognized that all things are impregnated with sense, and this sense only waits to be brought to light by the reader. Nature is not just like a book; nature itself is a book, and the man-made book is its analogue. Reading the man-made book is an act of midwifery. Reading, far from being an act of abstraction, is an act of incarnation. Reading is a somatic, bodily act of birth attendance witnessing the sense brought forth by all things encountered by the pilgrim through the pages. (p. 123)

Humanity birthing signs and symbols and interpretations are important threads to unravel in the capacious story of language; they are important threads to follow for the space that opens for interpretation and the words about poetry we are coming to. In his essay *Locating Living Pedagogy in Teacher "Research"*, Aoki (2003) takes us back to Sassaure to beautifully spell out the complicated relationships between signifiers and the signified and the performativity of language. Aoki's writings conjure up the notion that linguistic activities such as reading and writing *craft* the self. Language is an *embodied*

experience (Lakoff & Johnson 1999, Varela, Thompson & Rosch 1991) that feeds our co-creative enactions of the world.

Aoki (2003) slips Saussure's vertical (metaphoric) sign relations up against the linguist Jacobson's horizontal (metonymic) signs and draws out a space for the possible. Using Bhabha's "third space of ambivalent construction" (p. 5) Aoki leads this teacher/researcher to collective constellations gesturing to partial and incomplete meanings constituted in the spaces of differences. Constellations that open the possibility of a shadowed understanding of the unknown to remain alive in this desire to know everything. Into this intertextual (Hasebe-Ludt & Hurren, 2003) and interpretative space, a polyphony of voices, images, and experiences, can join the stories. The performative nature of language is taken up by the reader as he or she re-writes the passage, interprets meaning, transforms understanding. Language performs and transforms through language's ability to perform in multi-dimensional, polyphonic images perceived simultaneously by the learner and reciprocally interpreted by the reader/writer submerged in the world.

Poetry
Writ—worlde—ing
Lang—w[or(l)de—uage
Prac—world/word/we—tice
Lang—w[or(l)de—uage
Writ—worlde—ing
Poetry

In Manguel's (1996) chronicle of reading he admits that our love affair with the book, with reading, could not occur without the advent of the written word. They are one and the same, birthed at the beginning of their inception from the same impression of the text onto Cicero's "wax tablets of memory" (p. 57)

But writing is not the only invention come to life in the instant of that first incision: one other creation took place at the same time. Because the purpose of the act of writing was that the text be rescued -- that is to say, read -- the incision simultaneously created a reader, a role that came into being before the actual first reader acquired a physical presence....The writer was maker of messages, the creator of signs, but these signs and messages required a magus who would decipher them, recognize their meaning, give them voice. Writing required a reader. (p. 179)

The spiraling language story that I am typing out here is my attempt at “wayfinding” (Chambers in Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2009; Davis, 2009) through the texts and tellings that have come my way these past few years. Even as I practice **this** writing of **these** words I am surrounded by piles of words gathered by Gadamer, Bateson, Grumet, Hurren, Nielson, Lilburn and many, many more. And every time I stop and reread the words preceding this spot I am re-writing the story on the page again and again. These pages are providing a space for recursive reflection and a remembering of other voices and experiences that read into these events. I roll back up the pages and slip in another collection of words or take away something non-sensible. I move words around in an attempt to convey some meaning to the readers while remaining cognizant of the reader’s “third space” of re-writing the text. A space for interpretation.

Writer and teacher, Natalie Goldberg (2005) reminds me that, “The problem is we think we exist. We think our words are permanent and solid and stamp us forever. That’s not true. We write in the moment” (p. 34). It is odd. When I first recorded Goldberg’s lines I wrote the word *wards* instead of *words*; *wards* like in the children I gathered around me every day in the classroom. Aritha Van Herk, another wise writer and teacher once told me when revising their written words “authors hate to kill their babies”. Maybe the desire for permanence and generational longevity contributed to the confluence of events that lead to the loci of learning and understanding being in the *word of the text* rather than living within the relational spaces between the texts, between the

words, between the readers. And so literacy comes to conjure up a soul-less endeavour of reading words and recording words without interpretive spaces; as long as a child can communicate a desire to get to school or read a manual, they are literate.

Let's go back to this little chronicle of reading and writing. Something happens between Hugh's twelfth-century-world book as a site of pilgrimage (Illich, 1993) and western-modern-world book as *the word*. The next technological advance in the printed word was the invention of Gutenberg's press somewhere between 1440 and 1445 (Manguel, 2008). Up until the advent of the printing press, the text was limited to monastic scholarship and those few literate assemblies who had access to the hand-copied and sparsely circulated texts of Christian and philosophical tracts. However, with every disseminated text western cultural readers became more and more distanced from the spoken breath of the words. I think back to the words I read by Italian philosopher Sini (2008)

Writing isolates meaning from its original context of life, from the gesture of the living word experienced in concrete situations. (p. 17)

Somewhere in that distance between breath and word we lost sight of the reflective space within the words on the page and the reader's eyes. What do I mean by this? Somehow I am left in the classroom with a legacy of the text as being the word and not the place that is re-written with every telling. Even though through-out the historical story of reading and writing you can hear ancestral voices drawing our attention to just that; the recursion, reflection, and revision that should occur between the spaces of the written word and the reader. Even though we can sense how every time a reader reads a text, they are re-writing it, somehow the reflective space has been silenced. And, within that silence we forget that the reader/writer is changed and transformed through time.

Reading and writing are reciprocal processes. In the thirteenth century, Italian scholar and poet Francesco Petrarca (or Petrarch) said "reading rarely avoids danger unless the light of the divine truth, shines upon the reader, teaching what to seek and what to avoid" (Manguel, 1996, p. 64). This light shines differently on each of us, and differently at various stages in our lives. We can never return to the same book or even

the same page, because light for us is always changing with memories and new understandings. Petrarch is echoing Heraclitus.

Upon those who step into the rivers, different and ever different waters flow down.

I want to make this argument for writing to be a reflective space; a space where thoughts can be re-envisioned. I want to take up an idea that writing is a tool for silencing the cacophony of voices one swims in when one reads or engages in conversation with others or experiences something new and, writing remains a loci for re-examining understanding and shifting stances that I hold on to. Again, I am listening to the voice of Sini (2008) and my attention is drawn to the notion that the gathered words on a page have always been a space for new understanding to occur. Sini (2008) posits it was the “practice of writing that made it possible to improve the techniques of arguing, refuting and demonstrating, techniques subject to objective and intersubjective control” (p.18). This practice of writing, turned into a “habit of telling the truth” (p. 18) in “a correct form” (p. 18) may have emerged from a confluence of historical, political and cultural events that vied to place texts of knowledge before texts of reflexive storytelling. Nestled in a Cartesian world-view ‘true’ words have more influential power than the stories of a lifeworld in flux. Somehow we need to recreate “the third space” between poesis and noesis hinted at by the ‘polyhistorical’ poetics of Herakleitos, Sappho and Parmenides elevating the performative nature of language to the realm of *logical truth* (Sini, 2008).

*Dead men are gods, men are dead gods, said
Herakleitos. And furthermore,
mortal immortals are immortal mortals,
the breath of the one is the death of the other,
the dying of one is the life of the other
mortals are deathless, the deathless are mortal,
living in the body the death of the other,
dying into air, earth and fire, siring
the other, the utter*

incarnation.

(Herakleitos by Bringhurst, printed in *Poetry and Knowing*, 1995)

*I used to weave crowns.
yes! radiant lyre speak to me
become a voice
as the sweetapple reddens on a high branch
high on the highest branch and the applepickers forgot—
no, not forgot: were unable to reach*

(Sappho translated by Carson, in *Fragments of Sappho*, pp. 215 - 225)

*Racehorses take me. They stretch me. They pulled me
as far as the heart can hear when they ran with me
straight up the track that passes through everyone's voices.
They carried me, a non-god, open-eyed the whole way,
down a holy being's trail.*

(Parmenides translated in Bringhurst, 2007)

I want to share my understanding of the reflective space of writing so, I will tell some stories that are nestled around notebooks in order to draw this writing lifeworld, “seeking meaning not only in story but also in the dance of the body-subject through the prereflective landscape nestled in the shadows of the text” (Grumet, 1988, p. 61).

A Place on the Yellow Bus

Reader, remember the children on the yellow bus...

The notebooks that the children on the yellow bus held in their hands were large spiraled books of quality-gauged drawing paper. These notebooks no longer resembled the lined scribblers of previous years. These notebooks had to be purchased from outside the school board listed stores. I had to get a special budget number, approved by my principal, in order to place the order for the notebooks back in June so they would be ready for our first school days in September. Natalie Goldberg (1986) advises aspiring writers to,

[t]hink about your notebook. It is important. This is your equipment, like hammer and nails to a carpenter. (p. 6)

Over time these notebooks became the repository of the experiences we encountered together as a community of learners. For the children I understood the notebook provided a place of freedom, to give voice to myriad thinking generated from our shared experiences recorded in forms as varied as the thinking and the children themselves. There were lists of words and attempts at sketching, there were cut out pictures and imitated word bites. There were stories and paintings. The notebook provided a space to write the world alive and to write the world as it was/is experienced in a moment, a moment not consecutive but overlaid; teeming with simultaneous wavelengths. So, I wondered how did those notebooks come to be in the children's hands on that day? What happened to all those past scribbles filled between parallel blue lines throughout the year and then dumped into June's trashcan? Why had it become so difficult for these children to part with their notebook even for a weekend when I wished to read them with the luxury of Time?

Each child's notebook holds an arcane understanding that I cannot penetrate by reading alone; those words and images will remain as rigidly silent as they are permeable. The notebooks are constructions of ambivalent "third spaces" (Bhabha in Aoki, 2003). Spaces of "response-ability" (Aoki, 2003) that refer not to the ability to respond but rather to the ability to see the juxtaposition, the 'is' and the 'is not,' the 'said' and the 'unsaid', the 'presence' and the 'absence'. These are the 'shadows' taking hold of my attention and poking at my need to understand. These shadows fuel my desire to illuminate a threshold to the 'other'. Each of the stories encircling and weaving throughout the notebook entries perforating our classroom experiences may be what Smith (2008) refers to as "complex interface(s) that are at work whenever curriculum is deliberated and enacted." (p. xvi) They are lingering liminal spaces of return. I can never have knowledge of the story of how each of those other notebooks came to be. But I have my story and maybe the "graphe" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009) of my writing

story can whisper agreement, or “as is” (Zwicky, 2008) to the stories around the children’s notebooks.

Thus, the graphe of autobiography is a relational rather than a solitary act, and it is in and through the writing that relations, previously unrecognized, become visible and audible for the writer. Writing autobiography is a self-reflexive and self-critical act. (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 29)

Reader, listen to the stories from our teacher/researcher as she re-reads/re-writes her notebooks.

My notebooks span the twenty years that I have been teaching and when I flip through the past held *as the present* in those notebooks, I can begin to recognize patterns that emerge. Patterns that may tell me secrets about the traces laid down by these children. If I follow the tracks set down by collections of words scripted in my notebooks I begin to get a glimpse of someone who is coming to be in the world; someone who is as malleable as the words themselves. I begin to get a glimpse at someone who is formed by Gadamer’s (1975/2004) *Word* as she is forming her *Word*.

Every word breaks forth, as if from a center and is related to a whole, through which alone it is a word. Every word causes the whole of the language to which it belongs to resonate and the whole world-view that underlies it to appear. Thus every word, as the event of a moment, carries with it the unsaid, to which it is related by responding and summoning. (p. 454)

The words traced across pages and pages of notebooks are autobiographical sight-lines back to narratives of the past. The past is experienced in the reflective present and the “world-view” that underlies it appears in the stories circling my printed words.

These words I return to, convey a particular sense of events and experiences. These words attest to an ‘extraordinary, ordinary life’ spent in personal relationships, raising children, moving between provinces, changing jobs, and living ethically “amid the difficulties of a (teaching) life present in this new century” (Fowler, 2003, p. 165). The

autobiographical narratives encircling these words are more than mere reminiscence; they resonate polyphonically with experiences and connections.

Multiple resonances occur, because story appears to be the DNA, the genetic code of human consciousness. In this way narratives serve as force-field containers (in the Greek sense of *temenos*, or crucible) holding shards and images of difficulty long enough to examine them. (p. 165)

Each time I fall back to speak to these words, I can call on my memory, my *historicity*, to interpret these traces. Notebooked collections of words are sites for recursion, stepping back through time and transforming the site again and again. And so, to pull some whispers from the silence of the children, I find myself able to speak to my experience as a welder of the notebook and set that experience beside those of the children to find some communion.

This place of communion, this sense of exchange, an exchange of experience, an exchange of understanding, is informed by Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico's (1775) critique of modern science using Aristotle's notion of the *sensus communis*, interpreted by Gadamer (1975/2004),

He (Vico) does not deny the merits of modern science but shows its limits. Even with this new science and its mathematical methodology, we still cannot do without wisdom of the ancients and their cultivation of *prudentia* and *eloquentia*. But the most important thing in education is still something else – the training in the *sensus communis*, which is not nourished on the true but on the probable, the *verisimilar*. The main thing for our purposes is that here *sensus communis* obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community. According to Vico, what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race. Hence developing this communal sense is of decisive importance for living. (pp. 18-19)

Our (embodied) knowledge speaks to us whether we are consciously listening or not in every experience and every encounter we find ourselves connecting with. We would find

it difficult to exist attuned to the resonance of the world. Gadamer (2007) tells us that it takes an interruption to be addressed by polyphonic storytellers, to recognize ancestral stories holding us to the storied worlds within worlds in which we live.

We are social and interconnected beings from the get-go right down to our cells. We are 'in the world' and the 'world is in us'. Cellular biology reminds us the internal and external worlds of our cells exist without borders (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991). Our embodied knowledge is viscerally experienced knowledge fused with the knowing of the thing or the *noetic* (Lilburn, 1999). Biologists Varela, Thompson & Rosch (1991) tell us that

if we are forced to admit that cognition cannot be properly understood without common sense, and that common sense is none other than our bodily and social history, then the inevitable conclusion is that knower and known, mind and world, stand in relation to each other through mutual specification or dependent coorigination. (p. 150)

My notebooks are one site where I can return to and trace the language over the memories the written words enact for me and I *dependently co-originated* (Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991) with the world. Within each of those re-membered returns I gather together with the voices of colleagues in collegial discussions, the readings from ancestral fields and the experienced world I am living in and I read those word collections differently than the time before. Each cycle of viewing and reflection is informative, shifting my understanding – my cognition – of these experiences and within those *cognitive drifts* (Maturana & Varela, 1992), my perception of those re-membered and re-assembled events all shift.

We can now give a preliminary formulation of what we mean by enaction. In a nutshell, the enactive approach consists of two points: (1) perception consists in perceptually guided action and (2) cognitive structures emerge from the recurrent sensorimotor patterns that enable action to be perceptually guided. (p. 173)

In this way, as my perception of encircling narratives guide new interpretations of the stories, new cognitive understandings emerge. And with new emerging understandings,

come new perceptions of the narrative redressing the stories anew (Arendt, 1969) and circling back on the words.

*i mine words in the
caverns of text
i mine words along
literary rivers
standing knee deep
in circular pools
of lucite waters
sifting through syllabled silt
collecting polished pebbles of prose
left behind on panhandles
i pluck the gleaming insights and
rearrange gems to wear
around a bare neck
borrowed words
borrowed language
to manipulate
strip, reshape, redress
fashion to wear with purloined pearls
to be shared again
enriched and empowered
i steal
from discourse fore bearers
idea sweaters to warm my spine
sing forth the life of thought

breathing in, breathing out
enfolding and unfolding*

Oh Reader, come take a look through the Alice-glass again...

The spine of my first notebook was cracked on a twenty-year old summer day while sitting alongside my son. I had completed my inaugural teaching assignment with a community of grade one and two children, exhausted and inspired. I had decided I

would put my 'prereflective landscapes' of writing to work on my boy who needed a little nudge into 'literacy'. I purchased a notebook for each of us; for him, an eight and half inch by fourteen inch, blank-paged scrapbook to accommodate his large and unruly script, and for me a small-lined hard-covered notebook reflecting the 'experienced writer' I was. The memory of choosing those different containers for our thoughts conjures up the Cartesian worldview of the mechanized mind I held so unquestioningly much of my educational life.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the medieval world-view, based on Aristotelian philosophy and Christian theology, changed radically. The notion of an organic, living, and spiritual universe was replaced by that of the world as a machine, and the world machine became the dominant metaphor of the modern era. (Capra, 1996, p. 19)

I held to the notion that each participant in the world performed separate roles and my role as teacher or as parent was to aid the young people under my charge to grow and to develop into participating role players. I believed this growth could be accomplished by transferring the adult world I understood into each tiny little computer-like mind. I agreed with the constructionists that each individual child would take those examples I performed and would assimilate and construct their own meaning from them; "that the basic social/cultural unit that thinks, behaves, and experiences is the individual" (Bowers, 1995, p. 97) even as I experienced the world with others. The notebooks my son and I opened on the garden table one sunny day so many years ago mirrored the learners we each were. The young acolyte ready to listen and gather up knowledge and the seasoned Sophist about to impart her wisdom unaware of the inherent flaws. Through my demonstrated dedication to the task of daily writing, my young son would garner the skills and knowledge he needed to be a functioning writer before he headed back to school in the fall.

I sat us down each day for 10 minutes to write 'freely' in our books about our days; I structured those 10 minutes of silent 'free' writing removed from the distractions of seeing, touching, smelling the world around us. I provided my boy with ample writing

topics to choose from and an alphabet strip to help him with his letters. I encouraged him to work on his script and tighten up his dangling *ys* and floating *ts*. The writing was about the words on the page. This daily discipline of writing struggled against the calls from my son's friends to join them in runs through the sprinkler and jumps into the pool or to gather in the park for baseball and tree explorations. It wasn't long before those calls to summer play won out and I found myself alone at the table jotting down the daily events of a mother at home with a young child. And, in the new school year my ruled notebook attended the first meetings of scheduling and classroom organization filling the administrative week of September. When I look back at these entries, I am aware they were recorded reminders. The notebook contained reminders of what was discussed in meetings, lists of things to do, maps of desk arrangements, notes on which materials to purchase. The notebook was a record of events, proofs of working lessons, questions to the concern of certain students. The notebook was a journal or a diary.

Those first few notebooks are very different from the one with me now. I no longer purchase notebooks with blue lines and red ruled margins. Like the children in my learning community, my present notebook is particularly selected for how it opens and folds so that I can put it on my knee when someone is talking and I want to record their words. It has blank pages that I can sketch on when I start to drift away from conversations or I want to see in a way words cannot (Berger, 1977). The pages are of a good quality paper that accommodates my use of multiple colored pens for the shifts in thoughts that happen when I listen or think about what I have experienced. Again, Natalie Goldberg (1987) reminded me to,

experiment. Even try writing in a big drawing pad. It is true that the inside world creates the outside world, but the outside world and our tools also affect the way we form our thoughts. Try skywriting." (p. 7)

When I revisit my notebooks now I begin to be aware of accumulated collections of thoughts and experiences, ancestral and collegial quotes, interesting words and provocative statements, puzzles and bewilderments, all recorded like Hansel's pebbles leading back into the wilderness on familiar and new pathways. I don't see a linear

journey along the scripted lines within the notebooks anymore, I see complex systems of relationships between the children I have been learning with, the poets and thinkers I have been hearing, the conversations I have been a participant in at the university and at the coffee table, the city housing us, the techno-pop culture pumping our blood, the earth nourishing us, and the sun that energizes us. The notebook has not changed. It looks different, it feels different, but it is still a notebook. What has changed is my perception of the notebook as an object cut away from its contextual interdependence within these systems. And this perception makes it impossible for me not to be cognizant of the multiple voices that sing out from its pages. The notebook is a metaphor for my cognition enacted by my perception in a reciprocal relationship with the world I live in everyday.

In those notebooks I was interrupted by the disquiet I began to recognize. It was an engulfing disquiet generated by an assemblage of stalking dissonant educational concepts and finding locus in the writing programs that proliferate our profession. In any curriculum resource library a teacher can find titles such as *Step by Step Writing Lessons for K-1*, *6+1 Traits of Writing*, or *Writing with Results*. These approaches to writing did not ignite awe in literature rather they made me mournful for something. I wanted to weep as I dragged my children through lessons on writing about a character appearing angry by filling in the blanks with descriptive words from a prescribed list. This 'disequilibrium' placed me into a ghostly rocking with the voices that I was hearing in the classes I was attending at the university. I was taken up by a film on Mandelbrot's set and fractals. A scientist was trying to explain complexity theory using an interesting analogy. He imagined chaos as a microphone situated above a city as large and diverse as Beijing. The simple rule in such a city is 'people talk'. The microphone was recording these multitudinous voices and the resulting feedback as cacophonous and impossible to understand. But listened to over and over again patterns begin to emerge and similar tones find each other and collect together making the deciphering of the sounds easier and easier until finally some sounds, some voices become recognizable and you can become aware of their particular sounds. And when I heard that description, that story, I laid the story within the proximity of what I was trying to understand about systems of

thinking and writing. Maybe in the notebook I, too, can find recognizable and particular sounds.

*On rainy days
we played Scrabble*

*Lettered tiles held in
a Royal, blue velvet bag
Draw open golden ropes
scatter regal alphabet bones
across a laminate table*

*Slice stories through
the skin of the earth
orchestrate cascades of repair
fibrin clots, coagulated blood
festered formed scabs*

*Compelled fingers touch
rudimentary, red, regrowth
tissue tingles in painful pleasure
Raised worded scars
recede into flesh*

Language comes home

What I experience every day within the worlds I live in is chaotic and cacophonous. This embodied cognition is multifarious wilderness and every so often I funnel out something in the form of writing in those notebooks. Notebooks that then become sites for recursive contemplation which lead to interrupting bumps against current historicity (or held social and cultural knowledge) which lead to further cognitive drifts which lead back to the sites viewed anew (Arendt, 1969).

When consciousness crosses the divide into the wilderness of what is there, it expects to find a point of noetic privilege: at last a clear view into the heart of

things. But what it does find on the other side is further peculiarity, a new version of distance. (Lilburn, 1999, p. 4)

Once when I was trying to articulate what I was beginning to understand about the notions of autopoiesis and the *mechanisms* outlined by Maturana and Varela (1992), I was tongue tied and frustrated. I began with trying to create an image of riding on the bus down the road into Fish Creek Park; the road that cuts between the two stands of trees. The road and the grasslands behind the trees are shared by both the driver of the bus and the deer that cross the road to get to the bramble patches aligning the road shoulders. I was trying to language two simultaneous experiences of living on that road. There existed one physical space but the physical space emerged as two worlds. One I experienced differently than the deer and one the deer experienced differently than me. I was trying to language that somehow the experience of the space was simultaneously similar and dissimilar and shared in multiple dimensions. I was trying to language an understanding that multiple existences of the same space are enacted by those living in the space and that diverse simultaneously held spaces enfold the road and the trees and the grassland. But, I was using the word perception rather than experience and in my frustration I gave it up and said “I know it is simple, if you could just see what was inside my head”. I gave up trying to locate the experience within a collection of exact words. I was frustrated in my desire to use the technical finesse of well-chosen words organized into correctly formed descriptive paragraphs designed to frame the images and sensations embodied in the memory stripped from a memory rooted in the earth my feet touch. The limits of our language are the limits of our world (Wittgenstein cited in Phelan, 2004).

I am aware that this process of being in the world is circular like the feedback loop in autopoiesis (Maturana & Varela, 1992). The process is circular like the feedback loop with experience informing perception and perception filtering the experience through language. Even though the process is circular, I am aware that somehow coming into being is also expansive. I am aware of the desire to imitate and self-produce but I also recognize shifts and drifts in the formation. I recognize moments when I am interrupted and plunged into the desire to heed a shift in understanding or I am transfixed

by a whisper and I drift towards an other way of knowing. Being is more like an infolding and enfolding because my tradition, my history, becomes deeper and richer and denser and I can locate relational open spaces in the folds.

Reader, here is the story of the autopoiesis of eggs.

I have just learned how to fold eggs into a cake recipe. I have been baking for a long time and I never really understood what 'fold the eggs' meant when I read the instructions in a recipe. When I read I needed to fold two eggs into the batter I would stir the eggs in gently. Then I watched this Youtube video by a cooking instructor and it suddenly occurred to me that folding eggs into the batter is a very particular action and there is a particular reason for doing so correctly. You need to hold the spatula in a particular way and you need to ensure that you are pulling some of the batter up from inside the bowl over the eggs without pressing the eggs too firmly into the batter because you need the air pockets created by the movement of folding to allow the cake to be light and airy. By leaving space for those air bubbles in the batter a good baker is actually expanding the batter and creating something more out of what is there. So what does this have to do with the process of being? Maybe the image I want to share is that of the cake batter folded in on itself with spaces of density and spaces of air.

Maybe what I was trying to say was it is in experiencing the world that my perception of the world is shaped and my perception of the world shapes a world I experience. Put another way, only by experience – in the form of practice, action, living, moving, observing, paying attention to, participating in, feeling, intuiting, all of this is part of experience (experience is visceral, it is embodied) – am I opening myself up to receiving the experience. And then those experiences have the opportunity to reshape a world. And in many of those experiences I will share the path with others and we may find shared language that allows us to dialogue about these experienced realities, some of which may converge – not the experiences rather the language of the experiences converge and maybe this *language experience* is our shared reality. So Francisco Varela (1991) states that we enact a world into existence, Hans-Georg Gadamer

(1975/2004) would say we experience a world into existence, and Buddha might say we practice a world into existence. There is a reality, we experience every day, we live it. And it is reality actualized by our perceptions and our creative cognition of what we perceive.

What does all this philosophizing about the process of being have to do with kids and schools? I could easily walk into the classroom and engage in learning with kids and never give this “being” thing a second thought. In fact I may be ‘blissfully’ happier not thinking about *being*. But then my circle, my feedback loop will be very small. And the part I play in those children’s feedback loops will be limited as well and their feedback loops will be smaller for my ‘limited’ participation. A participation that is taken up and informed and controlled by an educational system that is being taken up and informed and controlled by a market economy driven democracy, in a biosphere where it is okay to clear away kilometres of old growth trees or bottle up reserves of fresh water for resale to the highest bidder, and so on and so on. And then we would all remain these little wheels turning around in the machine that we have set up for ourselves with the help of Descartes and his pals. And, it seems to me that that would be unethical. The Cartesian worldview can have a wonderful life in metaphors of clicking mice and whirring CPUs where knowledge is accumulated and accessible on demand.

Reader, come and stand inside a little house on a street in suburban Calgary. Stand on the stairs overlooking a cozy, living room on a Saturday morning. The whitewashed hardwood floor in front of the sofa is littered with typed pages struck through with pink highlighter markings; there are post-it notes peeking out of the multiple piles of books teetering on the coffee table. Watch and listen as the story of an interruption unfolds.

One afternoon I was sitting in my living room while two bright and articulate high school students gathered up the equipment they would need for a spring camping trip; my seventeen year old daughter and her friend. I was reading material by C. A. Bowers (1995) in which he was summarizing the mechanistic metaphors for intelligence that shape educational concepts perpetuated in schooling to-date. I came across this quote,

The view of intelligence as a measurable trait or aspect of the individual seems to have changed little in either content or breadth of acceptance from the time of Binet to the present. (Estes cited in Bowers, p. 102)

I asked the girls to come and join me in the living room. I wanted to ask them a question. (Maybe they thought I was querying the location of the camp or I was going to give them money for illegal essentials that always accompany these teenage road trips – I don't know, but my kids have gotten used to the WTF questions their mother often drops on them at the most inopportune time.) I don't know what I expected to hear from kids who have spent the last twelve years in a western educational system. After some humming and hawing about "do we have to do this now" the dialogue went something like this:

Me: If you could create a picture of your mind, not your brain because that's an organ, a picture of your thinking or intelligence what would it be?

Friend: I think of my mind like a box with all these things in it that need to be discovered. They're there, I just can't access them yet.

Daughter: Pandora's box. It's gonna be crazy there's so much stuff there. I could FSU (This is text-speak for F* Stuff Up which in teenage vernacular means be powerful). I could go forward with my plan to take over the world (she just wanted to get out of the house).

We have these Cartesian notions of knowledge as 'boxes' of solid matter. The 'boxes' can be filled up and sorted and reside in a specific place in the mind. Both girls allude to an idea that they are originators of the knowledge they will need; "all these things in it that need to be discovered" and "It's gonna be crazy there's so much stuff there". I wonder if these comments provide a glimpse into a pervasive idea of the individual as the central player in understanding and cognition. I wonder if these words and the narrative that encircles them gestures to a pervasive notion in western culture of the 'individual' as the constructor of knowledge.

The narrative of this moment is important as it demonstrates a way of being in the world perpetuated by an economic, colonizing western world-view, one that perceives the world as a resource to be exploited and used up by the 'ones' who can maintain control. This may be a way that can no longer be sustained evidenced by the loss of environmental commons (Bowers, 2009), global economic erosion, world-wide climate change. Maybe education, one of the last geographies of communally-experienced space or Vico's *sensus communis*, should be looking to cultivate another stance?

Students need to think about the moral and ecological criteria that are to be used in judging the ceremonies and narratives that are part of their own cultural and environmental commons, as well as how the ceremonies and narratives of other cultures contribute to less environmentally and colonizing patterns of existence. (Bowers, 2009, p. 409)

Maybe educators need to understand that humans are in need of something richer than just a carefully prescribed, textually language Geist. Maybe educators need to wrap schools up in multi-coloured cloaks and provide our learners with "a soul-place" or "a renewed connection between humans, places and the beings that dwell in these places" (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 14). And, maybe poetry and stories present difficulties as "as ifs" or shifted imitations to be held up and shared without prescription or direction or books of 'how to do' teaching and learning?

Notions of teacher-centeredness or student-centeredness are not very useful for making sense of these collectives [collectively generated knowledge; i.e., mathematics] – in large part because the phenomenon at the centre of each collective is not a teacher or a student, but the collective phenomenon of a shared insight, similar to what Bowers and Nickerson (2001) call a collective conceptual orientation. (Davis & Simmt, 2003, p. 153)

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1975/2004) talks about being concerned with "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing" (p. xxvi). I am aware since I began contemplating and inquiring into writing within classrooms, I have been transformed and so has the classroom I was in and of which I was a member. The

classrooms I will return to and be a member of can no longer be the same place regardless of occurring within the same physical space. The narrative that binds the classroom has taken on new threads and new patterns. I might say the story I am telling is more complicated than first time I told it. The words are the same. The children were all on the yellow bus. I was looking out the window at a landscape transformed that morning by a glossy film of rainwater as the yellow bus pulled into the picnic area in Fish Creek Park. However, my perception has evolved through *perceptually guided* action and my cognition of this story is emerging during the recursive visits to the memories evoked by a history of *structural coupling* (Maturana & Varela, 1992) with systems of knowledge and experience. My emerging knowledge is enriched by socially and culturally situated activities and experiences, embodied and nested in the world; iteration of the story re-enacts a new world. And the repository notebook can serve as a landscape for funneling and translating our multifarious experiences and the cacophonic voices that call to us. Maybe notebooks of reflexive return can guide our responsive voices. There is something exciting about uncovering mysteries and like reading Sappho's fragments of poetry on torn papyrus or pages riddled with holes, notebooks can be translated differently with every return.

Can I answer the questions I first posed at the beginning of the inquiry, questions that echo the dialogues I have been engaged in for the past couple of years? I don't know. For now, I understand that cognition is a creative spark that emerges within these interdependent relationships that we experience and build every day. Possibly that creative spark materializes as a poetic turn or an interesting collection of words. I am cognizant of the implication that this enacted understanding has for the work I engage in with children. I am cognizant that knowledge is a living system that is created within cultures and exchanged and transported between social networks. I am cognizant of more questions that will lead to more visits to this landscape. What happens to the educator who uses the language of complexity science to shape her perception of a classroom? I have to ask with Anne Phelan (2004) that with this new language what must one do to be heard? I have to wonder about learning within "collective conceptual orientations" (Davis & Simmt, 2003, p. 153) and whose voices are listened to and whose voices

become silent? Is it possible that holding the world anew (Arendt, 1969) makes returning to classrooms with 'as-is' ways of knowing environments more problematic and so we may succumb to the seductive, prescriptive ease of 'follow these steps and you too can have a generative, self-organizing classroom'? I am aware of the possibility of *commons education* (Bowers, 2008) emerging in the classroom; crossroads or nodal points amid the capillary of human journeys through immense landscapes we can never really see or understand. I am beginning to envision the notebook as a map that is rewritten and re-drawn with each return to the wilderness re-minding us of how much we have yet to explore.

And, I am aware that to breathe I need to keep learning.

Understanding is thus not method: It is learning to dwell in the presence of this river edge...and, under such witness, becoming someone because of it. (Jardine, 2006, p. x)

*Come
stand on the edge of imaginary landscapes
Apollinaire's urgings echoing in your toes
why report the weather
when you are interested in the heat
 within the open shadow and light contours
 of momentary intervals
between a new earth and sky
On the borderline between you and others
 dispossessed of assumptions
 in the air
 blurring viewpoints
 thick with experience
 that pass freely and easily
 into private property populated with intentions
There's no better place to travel risky terrains*

Schooled on a Yellow Bus

As a community of learners we explored two spaces, the one inside the classroom and the one in the wooded fields along the riverbank in Fish Creek Park. Like the “middle” space of the “curriculum-as-planned and the curriculum-as-lived” (Aoki, 2003), we were seeking a way to language our understanding of *living* between these two landscapes. We were trying to record a language that would gesture to the transitory memory of the lived experience, an experienced memory that would change upon each return. Maybe this is why the current writing is taking shape within two intersecting landscapes; the writing about the writing is living in the landscape of the classroom while the writing of the poetry is taken up in the landscape of the park. I am trying to draw threads between writing and social systems of education, between poetry and the natural realm of the outside world. I am not trying to say that poetry hearkens to some romantic notion of ‘getting back to mother earth’ or somehow the child is closer to nature and to the wild. The relationship is more complex than that; it is more diversely and contiguously telling than poetry as a map to the wilderness or ‘the child is a flower in nature’s garden’. The relationship is a métissage; it is braided, at times intertwined in rainbow threads, and at times looping around in a single colour. Maybe the language of the poem and the language of the story are trying to shake the metaphoric structures that solidify around the spaces. Somehow the insertion of lyrical and narrative language into the two spaces might provide for some glimpses into how these spaces are important to understanding the world together as a community. Jane Hirschfield (1997) hints at these images,

There is a door. It opens. Then it is closed. But a slip of light stays, like a scrap of unreadable paper, left on the floor, or the one red leaf the snow releases in March.

(Three times my life has opened in *Lives of the heart*)

Language has the ability to solidify and create impenetrable notions of how humanity should exist in the world. Words can be quantified, accumulated and

empowered to speak with expertise about a topic, an idea, a people, or an 'other' living entity.

The precision of observation, description and prediction chemistry and astronomy can achieve, while making the world seem clearer, represents a fading of human engagement with the world. Further, the requirements of this precision—its positing of a version that fits with its capacity and with its ambition to speak with utter clarity—represents a remodeling of the world that prejudices human enthrallment with it. Galileo's primary qualities and Descartes' extension and motion are not capable of arousing awe and tenderness. (Lilburn, 1999, pp. 73-74)

As an educator I struggle against the desire to name and define 'some thing' as 'this' for in doing so I also define what 'some thing' is not. I perpetuate binary stances of this and that and eliminate the possibility of in-between. In defining the 'this' and the 'that' I snip away at relational sinew holding a living world together. By naming this 'science' and that 'literature', I deny the opportunity for a student to write a poem to share a knowing of molecules or create a digitally-coded, univocalic version of Romeo and Juliet.

Again, I find it difficult to write about these ideas because certainly not everything named and defined, written and replicated becomes solidified into permanent layer-cake sediments. Bringhurst (2006) reminds me that poetry (lyrical modes) and stories (mythical modes) are historically, complex human literary modes.

Such narrative – oral epic and ballad – which thrived in Neolithic cultures from ancient Greece and India to Africa and Japan, may have been present in ancient Mexico and Peru – appears to draw upon both modes. So does lyric drama. So does lyric prose. And who's to say that spoken oral narrative cannot be just as lyrical as any lyric prose? But the analytic structures that thrive in expository prose seem determined to be neither lyric nor mythic. (Perhaps then, analytic structures represent another basic mode. If so, it is a mode that has so far only been identified in literate societies. And since the last of the world's truly oral cultures have been annihilated during my lifetime, hypotheses concerning them are now very difficult to test.) (pp. 226-227)

So, I am cautious when reading or writing “analytic structures” (p. 227) and I maintain a contemplative and inquiring stance when reading textbooks or ‘expert’ doctrines on topics. And I am troubled when our classrooms are shaped by the words of the ‘how-tos’ in educational techne.

Reader, listen to this odd little narrative of replicating words and shifting truths...

I have told a story about writing and the space it provides for recursion, reflection and revision experienced in the living practice of writing. However, the transformation story of oral language into a “solid form” (Bringhurst, 2004), read and written, has another tale to tell. This story lives in the curriculum as planned or between the pages of textbooks or under the binders of ‘how-to’ tropes. Before the words of language became cataloged and recorded, words lived within the voices of the bearers.

To bring the metaphor ashore, writing is language displaced from the mode of immediate gesture or speech to the mode of the memento – something like the seashells and the driftwood and the footprints on the beach. Writing is leftovers – but of a kind some people prize as highly as they do the original meal or the parent organism itself. (Bringhurst, 2004, p.10)

Educators continue to adhere to a hopeful allegiance with printed words in books about teaching programs in writing or mathematics claiming foolproof methodology and endless black-line masters. Written words that become the end-stop to thinking; designed to make our work easier/replicable. We scan the shelves of bookstores for the treatise that contain the answer to providing the best method for instruction. We sign up for workshops and seminars and purchase the latest program for supporting our students’ reading or scientific inquiry. We give power to the written word viewed as the origin, an original idea. We forget that those words are made possible by the language we speak together. Sini (2008) directs this teacher/researcher to go back to Plato and think about the “soul”. He asks us to re-envision Plato’s epistemic “soul” raised above the poetic “soul” and valued as the philosophical or the logical.

Its intelligent light veils and blinds us to the point that inverting the order of elements comes spontaneously to us. On the basis of Plato's (forgotten, and therefore unnoticed) gesture, one thinks that the mind is the cause of discourse; one does not realize that, on the contrary, the *mind emerges in discourse, in a certain mode or kind of discourse, and that it does not exist at all "before"*. (p. 9)

Sometimes poetry emerges from the confluence of similar images and the words find themselves intersecting in the most odd but familiar spaces. While working on a poem for this inquiry, I came across a reference to a bizarre little event in tenth century Persia. According to Manguel (1996),

the alphabet sometimes served as a key for retrieving volumes. In the tenth century, for instance, the Grand Vizier of Persia, Abdul Kassem Ismael, in order not to part with his collection of 117,000 volumes when travelling, had them carried by a caravan of four hundred camels trained to walk in alphabetical order. (p. 193)

If I had not been crafting the poem, I may have left this little 'fact' alone and marveled at the length one would go to keep their books with them. I might have used the fact the next time someone complained about the boxes of books taking up the very limited space in my basement. As it was, I was writing a poem that used this little story and thought it wise to seek out the language to visually conjure the caravan of camels crossing the desert in renaissance Persia lead by the learned Vizier. Seeking out the event in other contexts, I searched the Internet for references for this story and I found many, many sites that used the tale. And, I also found myself transformed into a sleuth.

At first, I was interested in the number of places the story appeared. The language of the story was taking hold in sites claiming interesting fact; sites like funtrivia.com or funnyfact.com. But, I was mining for (more) words to be borrowed for my poem, words to wrap around the event and create an allusion of time and, I was interested in different landscapes for the words. I continued reading the various on-line entries and I kept

coming across the same collection of words.¹ The word collections of the description of the event did not vary much from the passage in Manguel's book. However, I did not recognize the replication of descriptions as odd until I came across a blog thread on a site titled *Amusing Facts*. According to the webmaster of the site, he had uncovered a paper written by an Oslo librarian who believed that the caravan of camels may not be quite so amazing.

It appears that Alberto Manguel had referenced the story to a series of volumes entitled *The Literary History of Persia* by a Cambridge University professor named Edward G. Browne. According to the Oslo librarian, Knut Hegna (2002) when checking this reference he could find no mention of an Abdul Kassem Ismael in the index. However, when searching through the volumes, he had come across the following story.

The grand vizier's name is nowhere to be found in the index, but in the chronological part of Persia's history from the 10th century is a history that actually includes 400 camels. This story sounds quite different: The learned man Sahib Ismail B. Abbad was invited to be the grand vizier, but apologized that just to carry with them the library would require 400 camels. Browne specifies its source to be Ibn Khallikans Biographical dictionary, a Persian, biographical works of known Muslims, published in English translation from 1824 to 1970 and re-released in 1961.

Intrigued, I went back to my copy of *The History of Reading* and confirmed that Manguel had cited Browne as the source for this tale. So now I was curious. I had the name of the Sahib from the blog thread and I was able to find another source that referred to the "four hundred camel" comment in an open-sourced document about the life of a Persian poet Avicenna who lived between 980 and 1037 ACE.

¹ I have identified twenty sites with reference to the tale of 117,000 alphabetized camels crossing the Persian desert. This fact has been cited in a children's book about the history of the library and in a published article about library science. See appendix II for a listing of the sites.

No account of this creative period is complete without a reference to the chief ministers at the court of the various rulers who competed with one another in literary accomplishment, and in their patronage of men of letters. Of these Ibn Abbad was a distinguished poet, philologist and wit at the court of the Buyids in western Persia. He was such a lover of books that when the Samanid king invited him to become his vizier, one of his excuses for declining was that four hundred camels would be required to transport his library alone.

(Avicenna; His life (980-1037) and Work by Soheil M. Afnan)

And, finding copies of the Edward Browne (1956) volumes on the shelves of the University of Calgary's McKimmie Library, I too read the account of the generous "patron of poets and men of letters", Sahib Ismail B. Abbad and his "love of books", such that, being invited by the Samanid King Nuh II b Mansur to become his prime minister, he excused himself on this ground, amongst others, that four hundred camels would be required for the transport of his library alone. Poet, philologist, patron of letters, statesman and wit, the Sahib stands out as one of the brightest ornaments of that liberal and enlightened Buywahid dynasty of which, unfortunately, our knowledge is so much less complete than we could desire. (pp. 374-375)

This was an odd moment in time. I wondered if I was witnessing the shift of one story into another; witnessing a re-write. Or was I seeing how the story becomes scripted and replicated, emerging in more than one place. How story with language tethered to text in many spaces begins to stratify; becomes the quantifiable story? And does the 'truth' of this little story really matter in the historical genealogy of the *Literary History of Persia*. When I spoke of this sleuthing expedition to a colleague, she commented on the romance of the image of the four hundred alphabetized camels caravanning across the desert laboured under the crates of thousands of books compared to the flippant remark of a tired old gentleman who perceived an arduous moving task.

The past is a foreign country whose features are shaped by today's predilections, its strangeness domesticated by our own preservation. (Lowenthal, 1985, p. xvii)

Maybe telling this story gestures to the ecology of a living history; one where tales are able to be re-written as they are told. Maybe this story points to hearing tales that are folded like cake eggs into our understanding leaving spaces for interpretation and shift. The importance of this finding for my understanding of language is in the solidification of the form. The ability of words written in a space to become the word of the story, the 'this is how it is' of language. And, because we cannot critically analyze every event and every story told, language can calcify into place.

Calcified stories participate in the dance of theoria, praxis and poesis. Calcified stories are taken up in the theoria and praxis and they are articulated in the poesis of educators throughout our profession. Calcified stories chisel out the labels we apply to students. Calcified stories build the boxes we contain students in to accompany files of assessments and evaluations. Calcified stories cement together the bricks of the buildings we pour our learners into and lock the doors behind and close the blinds to the world outside.

Birth of a Nation

*A classroom of new students
Assemble before the Blank Screen*

CLICK

*Rectangular light reveals
a clean slate.*

First acetate transparency settles.

*Nestled cordillera, plateaus, hills, valleys, cliffs, basins
rise out from the enlightened wall.*

Second acetate blanket settles.

*Entwined rivers, deltas, lakes, falls, bays, inlets
Cut across the murky wall.*

Third acetate drape settles.

*Embowered plains, shield, tundra forests, treelines,
marshlands
grow from the muddied wall.*

*Fourth acetate cloak settles.
Embosomed copper mines, oil fields, forestry, granaries, power
stations, fisheries
scour across the mired wall.*

*Fifth acetate mask settles.
Enveloped cities, towns, reservations, municipalities, villages,
hamlets
populate throughout the mucky wall.*

*Historical geographies incarnate the map
of our lives slowly knitting
a Canadian identity re-dressing the viewers
CLICK*

*Reader come, visit a classroom on a late August morning. The summer holds its spent
breath curled up in bursting vegetable gardens and gangly flowerbeds. Stand in the
hallway of a waking school and peek inside an unfolding new year.*

My real concern was and is philosophic: not what we do or what we ought to do,
but what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing. (Gadamer,
1975/2004, xxv-xxvi)

Eyes wide open, sitting erect with her backpack on her lap, Shala waited for the
words “line up”. She was seated beside her learning buddy; a young Canadian Arabic
speaking classmate who would be responsible for providing fragmented translations of
the day’s instructions. Farsi is Shala’s first language, but like most global voyagers, she
has acquired multiple tongues and so, she knew enough Arabic to be able to comprehend
transitions and to follow instructions. Shala had arrived in Canada from Afghanistan, via

Pakistan, by-way of Toronto, three months before our initial sojourn to Fish Creek Park on the yellow bus. Those first few months in our classroom, Shala approached every mundane school experience with the earnestness of a new-world traveler. In the imagined world of 'text-book' teaching, she was a gift. Shala, the student, took up exercises and directions without question; a just-tell-me-what-to-do-and-I'll-do-it kind of student teachers of the 'how to' diction love. She was experiencing western schooling for the first time from under the kaleidoscopic veil of the immigrant's honeymoon. She was not one of the children who had endured successive educative years of learning squeezed out of them by worksheet drilling, stratified expectations; and the routinized banality of schooling. Shala was still embroiled in unraveling the complicated social networks that define the playground and shape the life of the Canadian student.

The August morning Shala first entered the classroom, I was unpacking supply boxes of pencils, paper, notebooks, erasers; sorting and stacking the materials that signify the beginning of every school year. The tables and desks were pushed to one side of the glistening linoleum floor and the smell of disinfectant washed across the room. Other than the stacks of school supplies lined along the counter, the room was empty. The only hint of the papered trails and pages that accumulate in and overflow the life of a school-year, lingered in silver staples still stuck in bulletin boards stripped in June. Shala was accompanied by an older brother who had been in Calgary for two years. We all shook hands during that first introduction and exchanged bright smiles and little head bobs and body gestures that filter the chasms between different languages. He provided translation for our abbreviated introduction and accompanied us on our school tour.

As we walked the box-strewn hallways of the school, he relayed to me Shala's excitement at attending a formal place of learning, an opportunity she had been denied in her past, and told me how he had enjoyed attending a community high school last year. The brother and sister exchanged joyful glances when I pointed out the library shelves of books and described our weekly reading circles and he retold of Shala's long-awaited arrival in Calgary the previous week to find her father debilitated by congenital heart disease and unable to return to work. He continued the tale of his hope to return to high school as soon as he helped his family get back on some financial footing. I talked about our daily physical education program and our multiple trips into the community and he whispered of the years Shala was secluded in the Afghan mountains protected by an uncle after she witnessed the killing of her mother at the hands of the Taliban when she was just four years old. And, I wondered at this space we three bodies now shared and how different it appeared to each of us.

The body is our vehicle for traversing space and for responding to the world's sensory stimuli; it is the location of our psyche, with its drives both creative and destructive; it is the tool we hone in order to communicate, to love and to hate; it offers a 'surface', inscribed by us and read by others; it is a sexed organism that matures, may well become diseased or maimed, and eventually dies; it is a social being on which institutions leave their imprint and by which they in their turn are modified; and which is variously endowed with attributes inherent and acquired (wealth, power and so on). The sort of body that we have prescribes the particular map that we use to navigate our life worlds. (van Gennep cited in Teather, 1999, pp. 12 -13)

We all stood eye to eye, each of us shaped by the experiences we had lived daily;
schooled within diverse environments. And I ask the question; how does Shala interpret
these corridors and doorways? How does she see the woman who stands before her
smiling, speaking in a foreign tongue, gesturing wildly about? What impressions are
made by the busy offices and the boxes of supplies and the sign-studded walls that
surround her? What does she make of the bricks and mortar that contain this space we
call school? How does she interpret what her place will be in the new space she now
occupies?

Who are these students mounted on wooden tablets?

How do they write

this time?

this space?

our place?

How does this mutative space write them?

Ring-around-the children

Ring-around-the parents

Ring-around-the teachers

We all fall down

On pages sailed across hallways and rooms

Contained within bounded walls

Behind discomfited doors.

Do you know how lovely

the warm horned handle feels in the palm?

Bleached and waxed floors beckon

enter Plato's tide.

Trickling water fountains arch across time

into semiotic worlds.

hidden within hornbooks of brick and mortar

pregnant possibilities.

fractured by the light of sun, ice, steam and clouds

Sensual schooling

*HORNBOOK...a leaf of paper containing the
alphabet, the Lord's Prayer, etc., mounted on a
wooden tablet with a handle, and protected by a
thin plate of horn.*

--The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998)

To Master John the English Maid

A horn-book gives of gingerbread,

And that the child may learn the better,

As he can name, he eats the letter.

--Matthew Prior (1717)

*etching experience onto bodies
transversing spaces
responding to touch
learning to speak
responding to love
learning to hate.
Writing our stories
shelved and read by others.
Stories of diseased bodies
maimed bodies
endowed bodies.
Body and self untwinable, pleated together
Navigating life worlds.*

*HORNBOOK...a treatise on the rudiments of a subject: a
primer*

--The Canadian Oxford Dictionary (1998)

Parked in a Yellow Bus

Our blanketing skin is etched by the spaces we traverse every day. Our bodies, our sense of selves, our sense of place in the world are embedded in tissue and appear impossible to untwine; “they are pleated together” (Teather, 1999, p. 12). Who we are is not fixed but shifting like sands along the beach, changing ourselves and the spaces we stand in. Like travelling the shoreline, the space remains familiar but somehow different, recognizable but renewed. Every experience, every event changes our perception of the world we exist in just as it changes the sense of who we are. These events do not need to be earth-shattering to be remembered, to be inscribed into our memory. More often they are quiet, small, seemingly insignificant to the on-looker, but they are climacteric. In the 2005 novel *The Sea*, I was captured by John Banville’s lines; “But then, at what moment, of all our moments, is life not utterly, utterly changed, until the final most momentous change of all” (p. 25). And, even in death I have to wonder if there is not just another shifting of the self.

Every day we are faced with challenges to the body, we are experiencing moments when we need to question the space around us, when we look again at a familiar site along returning paths home and are surprised at how different the site appears and question what change has occurred or wonder about the place of the change. We cannot deny our implicit culpability in the shifting sands of the spaces around us.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) tell us that “there is no such fully autonomous faculty of reason separate from and independent of bodily capacities such as perception and movement” (p. 17). A post-Darwinian evolutionary view supports the notion that “reason uses and grows out of such bodily capacities” (p. 17).

These findings of cognitive science are profoundly disquieting in two respects.

First, they tell us that human reason is a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and the peculiarities of our brains. Second, these results tell us that our bodies, brains, and interactions with our environment provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real. (p. 17)

As biological neural beings, we cannot ‘get beyond’ our categorized notions of what is ‘out there’ or ‘in here’; we cannot rationalize and examine separate states of interiority and exteriority; we cannot ‘untwine’ *the* self from *the* nation, *the* community, *the* family, *the* music, *the* visual arts. These categorized states are *definitively*, languaged into existence culturally and historically and politically. These categorized states are “cognitive structures” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) that have been singularized

and shaped and determined; they have been “enacted” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) by human history. Our cognition of our environment “is not representation but embodied action and...the world we cognize is not pre-given but enacted through our history of structural coupling” (p. 202). In my structurally coupled moment with Shala something is/was enacted.

The key point, then, is that the species brings forth and specifies its own domain of problems to be solved by statisficing; this domain does not exist “out there” in an environment that acts as a landing pad for organisms that somehow drop or parachute into the world. Instead, living beings and their environments stand in relation to each other through mutual specification and codetermination. (p. 198)

The link between interiority and exteriority is palpable. It pulses like the invisible spider’s thread of sticky, shiny webbing stretched across wind-blown branches or the living, connective tissue that secure our muscle to our bones so that we can travel across our landscapes. Maybe it is the sense of place that binds us to the spaces we are in. Ellis (2005) explains that place is “understood not as merely a location in physical space, but as a human conception and habitual site of human activity – and its placeness – understood as a subjective or intersubjective creation” (p. 58). Our sense of place is “dynamic and changing” and it is “deeply human” (Ellis, 2005) to make places and to think of our relationship to space as a sense of place; our place. Sense of place “refers to a personal connection with place, built up over years of residence and involvement in the community” (p. 60).

Communities are social cognitive constructs, collectively defined by human interest. Maybe in our attempts to 'rationalize' our place within our communities we negotiate some form of implicit agreement to authority, rules and norms that we no longer hear as spoken to us, rather we experience social mores as belonging to us. We give over to authority; we give banal consent (Arendt, 1963). Judith Slater (2003) informs us that

communities are distinguished by the style in which they are imagined, not by their genuineness...those who dominate promulgate their ideas onto the private space, where the participants hold less status...[t]he inclusion or exclusion of specific points of view within the public space is limited and the perception of what is possible in the arena becomes distorted by the imposed sanctions and limitations. What occurs is a "banal consensus" to the space by the public, for how out there takes issue with the truth. (p. 42)

Public spaces are a "hegemony of class, a dictatorship held over the community, the culture and the particular audience" (Slater, 2003, p. 42). Public spaces, in turn, seep under the skin of the body filling the spaces, the voices of public spaces becoming so loud the body hears only the words of those who hold power, no longer recognizing its own voice within the space. Robert Helfenbein, Jr. (2006) says that "places [I interpret him to mean public spaces] are fragmentary and inward turning histories" (p. 93) meshed with place identity, seething within the body, percolating under the skin.

Identity forms emerge in the interaction between space and place. Identity like culture can be seen as a 'field of struggle', a negotiation constantly waged against the structural formations that set limits upon bodies. Spaces are the limits within

which people move through, navigating and mapping as they go. Place-identity reflects the process of increasing individuation in relation to others or the 'the other'...identity both reflects and responds to relationships of power.

(Helfenbein, 2006, p. 93)

*Standing in the civic thresholds
of built environments
Standing before the genealogy of human walls
Histories of a pastoral past
entwined with a rooted present
ripening into the future
Is this the place to cross
the bridge and linger
in the earth
the sky
with mortals
with gods
Away from modern vectors
sketched by a special theory of relativity
Fashioning integrated selfhoods
layered and shifting
trapped by tyrannical choice
Confused fluid motions
of the high-speed First World
How do we live well together
How do we flourish as humans
How do we make a place
In the face of cubism
Within oneiric spaces
cellular room embodying
simultaneous, monotonous single voices
panopticonic picks chisel away
the walls between
spaces of play and spaces of work
creating one single intricately
divided space*

*building the civic body.
self-motivated,
self-directed,
self-instructed
self-managed
self-governed soul.
Our best machines are made of sunshine*

The school in which I walked with Shala is one of many public spaces fraught with power relations that are a “field of struggle” (Helfenbein, 2006, p. 93) for place identity. The walls echo with cultural, historical and political voices, voices that directed the laying of each brick and sealed in the space with mortar. Schools stand as a metaphor for progress; a conceptual metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999) propelling our desire to engage in this institution and to empower it with so much potential. And, schools are a space where we each have profoundly differing experiences. Our sense of place within public spaces is embodied and our sense of place within space “enacts” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991) our perceptions of the public space, as the perceptions of the space and our place within it shapes our sense of place. We are dancing iterated circles every day. And ‘public’ spaces, of which school is one, are informed by social, cultural and political dictatorships of the loudest voices. This is why I need to tell some of the story of this public space, this school that I am living in, because of the impact on my identity and on my place within this space called school and what this space reads on me every day and what I am trying to re-read on this space.

This space where I spend six hours daily with children matters and this space is an integral character in the story I am telling. This space matters because who I am within this space is voiced in the handshake and nod between Shala and I. The empowered

voice of school is also walking with her and her brother down the hallways deciding what code she will be assigned, how much money will be allotted to her education and what protocolled frames and expectations will adorn her files. So what is the shape of this character whose motto is written above the door frames children cross under when they enter a classroom? What is the shape of the character whose inception rose from the social desire to contain small bodies within walls rather than allowing them to roam urban streets? What is the shape of the character whose explicit purpose was to produce an army of workers who could push the wheel of progress along? How have I come to be an instrument of this machine? And how have I been bent and shaped by this space that contained my body for fifteen formative years and now entombs an adult form? How have these bricks and mortar penetrated the skin that reaches out to shake the hands of Shala and her brother? There is a genealogy here that needs to be explored.

I will start with a provocative statement: space and place are always politically, socially and culturally contested. If we think of spaces (particularly schools) as places that contain multiple bodies, we can imagine how they are not consensual notions on which we all unequivocally agree but, rather, contested sites, fought over by a variety of stakeholders [on a daily basis]. (Panayotidis, 2005, p. 31)

“Why did you become a teacher?” is a question I have struggled with in many of my graduate classes. I marvel at the comments of colleagues who speak of their genealogy of teaching; a parent in the profession, a favoured aunt, an inspirational teacher. I am enamoured by diatribes of the need for educational reform and my colleagues’ hope to be a participant in change. I attended to the singsong liturgy of

“children are our future and so we must invest in their success”. I do not remember having dreams of being a teacher. Other than the remembered stories of games of school played under the basement stairs with younger sisters, I do not recall having any aspirations to take up education as a profession. My youthful aspirations ran only as far as to what would get me out of my family’s house. The decision to become a teacher was one of those oddly-experienced singular events. It was an embodied event, not a rational, extemporized choice. Mine was an event that was fertilized by twenty-five years of educative seeding.

In 1986, after seven years floundering in a half a dozen corporate jobs, disenfranchised and disillusioned by the promises of success and personal satisfaction, I entered an elementary school as part of a practicum visit and I was overwhelmed by a sense of longing. I remember the smell in the air. I remember taking a drink at the fountain and the taste of tinny water. And I remember feeling I had run an oval track returning to a ‘place’ that welcomed me and surrounded me with something familiar and comforting; I was in the place I needed to be. This visceral experience was a pivotal event in influencing my decision to become an educator. What caused the sensation? I hold to the notion that Shala did not experience a ‘warm and fuzzy’ sense of home when she met with me that late August day seventeen years later. I cannot image any of the sights, sounds and smells she encountered that day in the halls of an East Calgary school had any echoes of her experience of schooling. The stories etched across her skin demand other questions. Her eyes perceived a space that tells another story. How has this kaleidoscopic view of a single building come to pass? This is the puzzle that confronts me every day with each new child who crosses the threshold. This is the

question causing me to fold back on my historical relationship with schooling to understand my place within a Canadian school. These vibrant moments before an other help me come to know this space of schooling better. Phelan and Garrison (1994) use Keller's "dynamic objectivity" to explain the paradoxical relationship of the role of "other persons, things, and events in the act of knowing" (p. 259).

Dynamic objectivity is premised on continuity, it recognizes difference between self and other as an opportunity for a deeper and more articulated kinship. The struggle to disentangle the self from other is itself a source of insight—potentially into the nature of both self and other. Genuine knowledge of others (persons, objects, or events) requires self-knowledge, a state that can only arise as the result of self-reflection. (p. 259)

So, like standing in a cave covered in webs, I am heading for the entrance in an attempt to "disentangle" (p. 259) myself from the place where I stand. Of course, sinewy webs have a way of clinging in your hair and dangling invisibly from your back or they unravel behind your heel keeping you connected to the cave you are trying to escape, taking the cave with you where you go. We can never come away clean.

When you enter any school or administrative building in the Calgary Board of Education's community, you are greeted with the words "Educating Tomorrow's Citizens Today" (retrieved from <http://www.cbe.ab.ca/aboutus/mission.asp>). These four words have been whittled and pared down to reflect the goals the Board of Education has set out in its current three-year plan; a plan that covers **individual** academic success, **individual** citizenry, **individual** attitudes, and **individual** character. This is a three-year plan to produce individuals who will "complete high school with a foundation of learning to

function effectively in life, work and continued learning”

(<http://www.cbe.ab.ca/aboutus/mission.asp>).

It's a fine plan. It's a fine plan that came together amongst the discussions and contributions of educators, government agencies, public politicians, public advocates and corporate investors. They are not a team of nefarious conspirators involved in some menacing manipulations to ensure enslavement of the next generation to the machinations of a corporate capitalist regime. They are just 'trying to do good' for our kids. If asked, someone from 'Team Calgary' might explain they are putting forward a school agenda that has always existed but an agenda that needs to be revisited every so often to reflect a changing society. However, as the story of Canadian education unfolds, this notion of educative change may be a paradox in itself; although the guise of schooling may change to reflect the face of a changing community, the content remains the same. The content remains invested in the **individual** success of each schooled body to become a participating cog in the progressive wheel of a market economy.

In the preface to *A Common Countenance*, Sutherland (2008) tells us that

from the very beginning of settlement in Canada until the present, parents and society have agreed that children need to learn how to do the essential tasks of what would become their lifetime work, they must learn enough cultural skills to function within their society, and they must learn the norms that will govern their behaviour towards each other and in society as a whole. (p. xxv)

But something has conspired to get us here. The education of young children housed together in public buildings under the gaze of a panoptic eye has not always existed.

There was a time when the responsibility of educating new generations belonged to the

families that bore them and the villages that raised them. Sutherland (2008) suggests that, “until the 1880s, English Canadians showed little awareness of children as individuals and had little insight into their inner emotional life” (p. 30). Sutherland explains that surveys of our educational history such as Tomkins’ *A Common Countenance* provide opportunities to engender a “realistic perspective” (Sutherland in Tomkins, 2008) and

in so doing it avoids overemphasizing the stability and continuity that people are prone to idealize in the past. Instead, it [*A Common Countenance*] shows us the tensions that persist between a society increasingly characterized by considerable change and educational institutions called upon to meet perennial needs such as basic literacy, as well as the need for skills demanded by a transformed economic and social environment. (p. xxvii)

Humanity has been gathering to exchange languaged ideas for thousands and thousands of years. The event of gathering persons engaged in exchanging information in one space is not an eighteenth century innovation. There are pictorial stories enshrined on the cave walls of Lascaux, Ardennes and Chauvet. Plato and Aristotle drew young boys from all over Ancient Greece to the Academy of Athens. St. Augustine taught “literature and elocution in the city of Milan” (Manguel, 1996, p.41) in CE 383. In the twelfth century, Hugh of St. Victor taught his young academy students to “expand and refine their memory skills through the construction of an interior treasure chest (Illich, 1993, p. 35) needed to develop reading skills. But by the eighteenth century the ideal of an “academy” (Manguel, 1996) for the male aristocracy or the religious cleric of the previous eras had morphed into the urban university and the parochial multi-aged

schoolhouse charged with the duty of teaching the reading of religious tracts and the libraries of knowledge. The body of learning and the bodies of those that learned always requested a space of their own. Is it possible that a confluence of learned space, industrialized displacement, developmental psychology, and social control emerged in the eighteenth century schoolhouse?

The form of school that we participate in today is a shape-shifter. In a converging, complex and multi-dimensional response to the changing relationships between citizenry and the emerging industrial urban centres, eighteenth century educational reform movements turned their attention to the newly defined child. A child found lost between the disappearing locally-based economic unit in which parents and children both performed and *culturalized* on farms or in village cottage industries and the grueling industrialized spaces that were opening up in the cities. A child found left behind in a love-centred, nurturing unit with much of its training and educational function gone (Huston, 1982). A child categorized and catalogued in the emerging professions of developmental psychologists and social scientists. A child taken up in the “child-saving” movement of Great Britain that “led to the migration to Canada of 80,000 British orphan children between 1868 and 1923” (Tomkins, 2008, p. 30). Children, street urchins, who by “the 1890s where seen as threats to the well being of society” (p. 30). Something needed to be done to control these unruly and uncivil and uncounted members of the social community. Within the factory systems, the modern nuclear family would take responsibility for their children’s development and life chances, but there was a social

need to mould the child's moral character and ensure he or she would contribute to the new age of production.

“Waifs and strays” (Huston, 1982, p. 129) were not alone in need of moral and social direction. Growing urban centres became the Mecca for many diverse and displaced persons. Industrializing Canadian cities became beacons to hundreds and thousands of European immigrant populations looking for a new home and promises of prosperity. These newly arrived families were immersed in cultural tensions with an anglocentric, Victorian, middle-class. Within cities like Montreal, working-class families lived in fairly constant contact with disease, poverty, and death. The newborn children of the poor were almost as likely to die as to live. Many families were fragmented by the death of a mother or father. Many more experienced periods when one or both parents or children were sick, perhaps hovering on death. The high incidence of disease coupled with the fragility of many a family's earning power presented constant challenges to basic survival and to family coherence. (Bradbury, 1982, p. 109)

Added to the urban immigrant population was a growing internal migrant worker wave from the country's eastern sea-port villages and rural communities (Bradbury, 1982). Within this throng of a much-desired and reviled workforce, grew a growing awareness of a once-silenced and now ‘difficult’ first nations population. All of these diverse peoples would need to be nationalized under the ‘common’ vision of productive Canadian citizenry and all of these peoples would need to be obedient to that vision.

Public schooling was one answer. Walls were erected around the ‘wayward throngs’ of children emerging in urban centres and across immigrant populated prairies.

Maybe this turn in history is the site where we began to hear the whisper of ‘children are our future’. The growing voices of the ‘professionals’ in social reform and education looked to children for shaping a Christian moral and obedient populace needed to progress an expanding industrial era (Mackay, 2002). In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, evidence of moral modeling could be viewed through the opalescent glass murals installed in the windows of the kindergarten rooms in many Toronto public schools. These bucolic images of the “wonderland of childhood” depicted nursery rhyme characters working quietly in gardens and at play with Froebel’s “Pat-a-Cake” play songs (MacKay, 2002). Already the influence of the seventeenth century, German educator, Friedrich Froebel’s romantic notions of the “garden of children” were sharing the stage with the Toronto’s School Beautiful Movement (Mackay, 2002, pp. 178-179) inspired by the work of Victorian England’s John Ruskin. Froebel’s play songs taught to the youngest of children, were written to supplant an educational system “that had placed the highest value on the absorption of quantities of knowledge” with an educative moral system based on “bring[ing] children into harmony with God, nature, and other human beings within a loving or ‘delightful’ environment” (MacKay, 2002, p. 181). John Ruskin encouraged the installation of art in classrooms because as he explained “Education does not mean teaching people to know what they do not know,” but “teaching them to behave as they do not behave” (p. 177). In Toronto, the Ruskin inspired Mural Movement led to the installation of beautifully imaged glass windows

designed to work indirectly, by encouraging children to adopt behaviour appropriate to this purpose. In particular, these glass murals encouraged honesty, obedience, industriousness, thrift, perseverance, conformity, respect for elders, and Christian piety. (p. 174)

The social ethics of an industrial moral character and a good-Christian worker was also articulated in the rise of the Victorian urban gardens that sprang up throughout American cities as well as Upper and Lower Canada (Robin, 2001). The Progressive reformers in the United States who founded the Nature-Study Movement saw the school garden “as a convenient means to achieve multiple social aims: city beautification, the reduction of juvenile delinquency, improved public health and nutrition, Americanization of immigrants, and the creation of good workers and citizens” (Trelstad, 1997, p. 162). Schools were encouraged to send children out to work in the gardens to produce food and income for their families. Children who are romanticized as closer to puerile nature could be nurtured and cultivated to ‘grow’ into productive, responsible and controlled members of society.

Eighteenth century Canadian educational re-formers such as Egerton Ryerson in Ontario and David J. Goggin in the west belonged to “the American Association for the Advancement of Science and to the British Association, both of which met in Canada a number of times between 1850 and 1900” (Tomkins, 2008, p. 31). Like the plotted and organized income-generating school garden of the United States, Canadian Victorian schools were laying the foundational space for the perpetuation of progress. Echoes of

the ordered, lineated progress of the factory conveyer belt and the routinized and department approach to production vibrate in the labyrinth hallways of individual classroom doors lining school buildings. Each doorway leads to a class of students separated by grade and discipline.

As the century turned, industrialized urban centres were shifting into market economies requiring the citizenry to be re-categorized and streamed into their productive and consumptive roles. In the United States, the drive for industrial efficiency was taken up by the movement to standardize roles in production. The 'efficiency movement' of the twentieth century was founded on the work of Fredrick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915). In their recent writings for the Western Canadian Protocol, Friesen and Jardine (2006) retell a fascinating story of the influential work of Taylor on the structuring of the American economic and social organizations that reached into educational circles to shape the 'assembly-line' type schooling of today.

This movement arose out of Taylor's observations on the shop floors of various industries and his development of what he called time and motion studies. In order to make such industries more efficient and less wasteful of time, materials and energy, Taylor broke down any particular task into its component parts and laid out ways in which the organization, management and sequencing of that task could be more efficiently organized. This required regimes of standardization, surveillance, sequencing, and many other now-familiar consequences. It led to shop managers being able to assess any finished product, target any errors in production, and precisely assess and locate the source of such errors. Its most pristine cultural image is that of Henry Ford's assembly line: each worker has

placed in front of them an isolated, repeated task to be done with singular, standardized procedures and invariant materials. The task for workers is simply to learn by rote and repetition the efficient accomplishment of this one, isolated task. (Friesen & Jardine, 2006, p. 9)

In 1916 Ellwood P. Cubberley, Dean of the School of Education at Stanford, noted that “schools are, in a sense, factories in which the raw products (children) are to be shaped and fashioned” and “it is the business of the school to build its pupils according to the specifications laid down” (Freisen & Jardine, 2006, p. 10). By the 1930s the efficient and scientific approach to ‘departmental, standardized, assembly-lined’ production had insinuated itself into the ‘new’ social and psychological sciences that were shaping schooling across America and had trickled across the border into Canada.

This is the historical story that ghosts the hallways of the school that Shahla and I now walk. This is the educational legacy that shaped the questions and plans generating as I contemplated Shala’s next few weeks in my classroom on that August day -- questions and plans articulated by a notion of schooling children in a manner that is efficient, managerialized, surveyed, categorized, identified, programmed, evaluated, and moved on along the “conveyer belt” of education. And this is the place where I returned to feel ‘at home’ those twenty-odd years ago. Maybe because this is the space that shaped my bizarre belief that this is how the world works even as experience whispered to me this beliefs’ betrayal; a liminal space, difficultly experienced. And, maybe this troubled space would help me re-focus my gaze in the face of the other.

*Lost in the landscape between
childhood and adulthood
Terra incognita
Composing a life in improvisation*

Through transitions and passages
In the marketplace where history and memory meet
 In space of place
 In space of flow
Rooted chora
 Ruptured articulation
 Imagined worlds choreographed in quick-time
Loops of separation transition incorporation
 Epidermic surfaces organizing flesh
 Assemblages of skin and bones
 psychically inscribed on maps of desire

Mimeographed tales of disembodied lives
 pointed similes of fingers
 sassy red-plan-booked intentions
 transforming beliefs into knowledge
Translating lessons into bone
Skin adhered to bricks and mortar
 carrying dreams and wondering the world
 conversational crickets stringing memories
 to dry in the wind
Precarious prayers of belonging
 productive chords of resistance
Liminal spaces and recursive slides
 restless feet and veiled eyes
 spicy village mice
Voices trapped in mazed corridors
Nurtured spaces we live in
Spaces nurtured the lives we live
 and the skin that I'm in
 covering the faults of my spine
Body of space presented
 and re-presented
 shaped and reshaped
Co-creators of storied knowledge
 talked only in whispers

Like the Monty Python universe song, this condensed saga of education in Canada, does not express the complexity of events that lead to this moment between Shala and I. It only serves to contextualize my story and my place within our shared space. It only serves to enlighten that moment's own complex instant and only from the place where I view the horizon. Maybe this metaphorical notion of school as progress is what drove Shala and her brother to me that late summer morning. Maybe some imported notion of this western institution made its way into the hills of Afghanistan and seeped into her pores and brought her here to me. And, here she is seeping into my pores and shifting the sand beneath my feet.

*Ocean rising slowly flooding the Islands
Snow melting, ocean rising
Icy water everywhere.*

*Wind flying over long pointy pine trees.
Soft cold stiff snow.
Clouds look like big comfortable pillows.
Shala*

So here is the question...what did she see as she walked those hallways as she focused her gaze on this schooling space? What did she see, hear and feel within those walls each day she entered the threshold of schooling? Watching Shala smile and nod at the spaces I pointed out at each juncture of our tour I wondered at what she was seeing. The posters on the walls, the signs announcing the administration offices and the library, the rules about entering the school, the forms her brother needed to fill out, I wondered about how each of these 'signs' were being taken up by her. How does this schooling space make possible or deny in terms of teaching, learning and curriculum? What does

this space infer, reinforce and perpetuate in regard to social organization, educational policy and cultural discourses? And in the face of the other, what questions are raised for me a teacher learning to learn?

*The kindly local antiquarian
opens the travel valise
of Miss. Helen M. Hibberd
an olympian five years spent
purveying knowledge
to the children of trappers and tie hackers
settled in collections
of shacks along dirt roads north
in man's country*

*Breathes in the fecunded smell
of traded petticoats for trousers
to walk down logging trails
penetrating silent forests
nourishing naias growth
diversifying rooted vines
warped among spectres
of golden spruce boughs*

*Glances into the
diplomatic gatherings with neighbours
chaperoned dances
orchestrated concerts
stoked stoves
stroked womanly ideals
kindle young boy fires
fodder for domestic family photos*

*Hears the rumoured mystery and urban alienness
drift into town
piece by piece
collected on tattered fences*

*surrounding bare dirty schoolyards
scraps of whispers trapped
in the edges of cracked classroom windows*

*Startles to the train whistle's litany
of papa's pioneer promise
education is order
education is progress
education is Canadian
and bring the girl*

The Road the Yellow Bus Travels

Reader, listen up...the poet has something to say.

In translation. Currently I have come to the understanding that poetry is a kind of translation. Poetry is a kind of translation of experience. It is a translation of superfluous language—the words and thoughts that I could not put down in a space or articulate to another colleague but somehow intuited as significant. Superfluous words that are left over—cryogenically frozen between layers of cells awaiting their turn in the weaves of language emerging from new experiences within common meeting places of multiple voices. Superfluous cast-offed, fluid words woven into mega structures, permanent as the wind and able to enhance and erode the concrete-solid spectacles of old-speak. Poetry emerges from surplus thinking. It is language splattered on a canvas like a Pollack painting.

And I believe the poetry I am writing is a metaphor for the students I learn with in classrooms. Students are poems, students are translations—rather I am trying to translate them into some understanding of learning; trying to understand what they understand about the world or the disciplines we take up. My professional translations of students hold them up to the language of education—translations sifted through a sieve of educational speak. But, like poetry, students remain fluid and full of possibilities.

Students are like perforated stories, full of these little spaces where something else awaits, something else is always *in waiting* to gain entrance to the their story and shift it. A poem is like Heraclitus' river in which you can never place your foot in the same space and hope to experience the same event the same way. Students are like the river—they come in similar bodies and question with similar voices. We experience learning in similar spaces—classrooms, schoolyards, amid topics of conversations—but never are the bodies or the experiences the same. These stories are composites, bricolages, cobbled works that tell of moments through a particular lens. The poetry is the gesture to the possible and frames a threshold to the world.

When Jackson Pollack (CBC, The Sunday Edition, June 19, 2011) completed one of his early 'drip paintings' he asked this question to his wife, artist Lee Kastner, "Is this a painting?" I echo his question, "Is this a poem?", "Is this a learner?", "Is this an understanding?", "Is this a research study?".

*hear
the interruption
sound of an other's
way of knowing
i'm folding back
arrested by an echoed moment*

*thought is spring-river fast
fleeting
down-bank ideas
await in eddies
multiple mappings current along
converge, connect
constrain flow
thought released*

understanding pools

Reader, come again to the classroom as the students embark on their excursion on the

yellow bus.

His boney, long limbs stuck out at odd angles from within the little desk allotted to our community of grade five and six students. Among the chatter of his deskmates, Chad was silently hunched, pencil awkwardly angled in his hand raising dragons and demons from the blank pages of a standard school notebook. Amid the arguments of schoolyard soccer battles and who should be the recorder of their solutions to the problem on the board, he was cocooned inside the vision he so desperately wished to set down on paper. Intent on this one act, Chad could make himself ephemerally alien in this crowded room.

Chad was a twelve year old boy hard not to miss in a classroom of ten and eleven year olds. He stood about a foot taller than any of the children. His pimpled face and lanky, oily hair hinted to the teenager that he was becoming and when he spoke—if he spoke—his voice shuffled between the two imposed states of childhood and adolescence. Packed into the Chad-file that arrives with each of our children every year, was a psychologist's report and an IPP (Individual Progress Plan) illuminating his many academic deficiencies and dimming the unique ways that he had developed to find his way in schooling. I could open the file to read about his learning needs—he was an at-grade reader but a 'well-below' grade-level writer, he still had not mastered a grade three spelling level—but I would need to experience his empathic analysis of the characters in the stories he attended to and I would need to see the complex interpretations he gleaned from those tales in his detailed drawings. I could read his previous teacher's filed comments and note his inability to retain simple math facts and follow arithmetic algorithms, but I would have to observe the creative approach he took to solving an area and perimeter problem or the petroglyphic method he had devised to successfully uncover solutions to mathematical operations. All these 'odd' little ways of knowing were clues to translating the mystery of a boy. A boy expected to live in the 'common' world of public education and be aligned with expectations laid out by a 'common' curriculum.

As I watched him gather up his pencils and sketchbook, unfold his long body from the desk, and lurch across the room to join his pals at the back of the line I wondered at what images

he would fill his pages with. What view from the yellow bus outing would capture his attention and demand he meticulously record every detail and texture before him translating his experience into language?

What is His Code??

*The boy wrapped around a desk
shapes a scrabble wor[l]d
from the end of a HB7
fitted carefully between gameboard
lines and squares*

*Shadows settle between
the story he tells
and tale I hear*

*Wor[l]ds explode from after-image traces
stilled in the air
letters shatter and clatter and scatter
about the room*

*I pick noetic shrapnel shards
from my neoprene skin
discard unfamiliar pieces
collect words that fit the file
and wrap them around the boy
wrapped around a desk*

In her book *Wisdom and Metaphor* (2008), poet and teacher Jan Zwicky argues that those who think metaphorically are enabled to think “truly” because the “shape of their thinking echoes the shape of the world” (in the foreword). For poets and philosophers like Zwicky and Robert Bringham, Tim Lilburn and Dennis Lee, poetic language is a way to know the world in its ‘emergent energy’. Poetry is a way of understanding lived experience as fleeting and supple and a knowing that is unknowing or apophatic (Lilburn, 1999). Poetry involves the use of language more for purposes of

discovery than for purposes of control (Bringhurst, 2006). Poetic language is language freed from its noetic stance; the type of language that is 'essayed'; structured and analytically directing the reader to a singularity of the thought. Poetry denies language that seeks out originality as single spark and rather gestures to language that originates from a source in a confluence of singing voices. It is a collection of polyphonic words that unveils the tenacious sounds of many voices. And so it is rooted in ecology of understand generated in an interconnected and co-creative community. Poetry like music or dancing or painting often becomes muddled in the notions of self-expression, of belonging to the singular spark of creative originality. But poetry is a reminder of an "older, richer, larger and more knowledgeable whole we call the world" (Bringhurst, 2006, p. 144) and when you "go to work for the poem, you give yourself away" (p. 145).

When you think intensely and beautifully, something happens. That something is called poetry. If you think that way and speak at the same time, poetry gets in your mouth, if people hear you, it gets in their ears. If you think that way and write at the same time, then poetry gets written. But poetry exists in any case. The question is only: are you going to take part, and if so how? (p. 143)

Poetry lives in the world.

All genuine understanding is a form of seeing-as; it is fundamentally spatial in organization...Metaphor is a species of understanding; a form of seeing as: it has, we might say, flex. We see, simultaneously, similarities and dissimilarities. (Zwicky, 2008, pp. 3 - 5)

Poetry is metaphoric thinking. It is rooted in our DNA. For Lakoff and Johnson (1999) who conjecture that language shapes and structures our reality, metaphors "have entailments through which they highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience" (p. 155). For textual social beings a given metaphor "may be the only way to highlight and coherently organize" (p. 156) our experiences and allow us to share those experiences with others.

Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will of course, fit the metaphor. This will in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies. (p. 156)

We are poetic beings.

In *Philosophy in the Flesh*, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) debunk the myth that we can use an objective language that is devoid of any political or social agenda; that people can be objective and speak objectively if they use words that are “literal and ...name objectively existing things and objectively existing categories in the world” (p. 121). Lakoff and Johnson’s work on the metaphors that bind us denies the notions that metaphor and other kinds of poetic or figurative language can always be avoided in speaking objectively because “conceptual metaphor is what makes most abstract thought possible...conceptual metaphor is one of the greatest of our intellectual gifts” (p. 129). Rather, metaphoric language has been harnessed to shape our understanding in nefarious ways. A dead metaphor, an atrophied metaphor, no longer able to vibrate with possibility, to interrupt banal flows of thought, holds stagnate conceptions in solid amber isolated from the breath of the world.

In gathering copious examples of how people write and talk about arguments, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) point to the structuring capacity of the metaphor to shape our conception of ideas. For example, here is some of the war-like language that surrounds notions of arguments.

Your claims are indefensible.
He attacked every weak point in my argument.
His criticisms were right on target.
I demolished his argument.
I’ve never won an argument with him.
You disagree? If you use that strategy, he’ll wipe you out.

He shot down all of my arguments. (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 5)

The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another... (A)rgument is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of WAR. The concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured... The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal. We talk about arguments that way because we conceive them that way – and we act according to the way we conceive of things. (p. 5)

And, we conceive war in this manner because we language it in to being? So we can't deny metaphor by stripping it from our language and pretending if we speak or write scientifically we will have a real image of the world. Poetry does not pretend to be anything but language that lives in the world. Poetry does not pretend to be anything but metaphor. Bringhurst (2008) points to literature or poetry being "a part of language itself; present, like language, in every human community" (p. 15).

There are not natural languages without stories, just as there are not stories without sentences. Yet literature is not the cause of writing for purposes that have little or nothing to do with social and economic control. (p. 15)

Metaphor is a species of "seeing-as" (Zwicky, 2008), of looking at the world or an event held against something else so that we might glimpse at what lies between or what might open up a space for interpretation. Gadamer (1972) reminds us not to think of the poet as a liar; unable to speak the truth of the real world because "they only have an aesthetic effect", and are "imaginative creations". Poetry as untruth belongs to the "global demand of the Enlightenment" and the desire to strip away "all prejudices" (p. 276). "It is the old quarrel between the poets and the philosophers in the modern garb appropriate to the age of belief in science" (p. 277). Our obsession with 'clear' language stripped of connective tissue narrows the words and causes us to learn the stories "incompletely" or to lose the language completely (Bringhurst, 2006).

When languages atrophy – sometimes centuries before they are clinically dead – what happens is that they are learned incompletely, even by those who learn them

first. So the last things learned in the best conditions – or the things most rarely learned in full – are the first things lost. Those are the big trees and forests of language: the structures and textures of whole mythologies and metaphorical systems, then of complex stories, metaphors and arguments. That is to say, the shapes of things much larger than the sentence. (p. 251)

Reader look here at the boy beneath the tree...

There he is standing against his mirrored image in the woods, a tall and slender poplar tree. He has been stilled from the act of a paper rubbing of the bark of the tree by the rustle of wind through verdant leaves above him. He is straining his neck and body to physically immerse himself in that sound. His body strains against the gravity holding him to the earth but his attention travels on the air to settle amongst the shimmering, whispering leaves. Reader watch carefully as the boy closes his eyes and wonder at what he is feeling as the dappled sunlight alights on his face and about what he is thinking as the warm breeze lifts wisps of his blond hair. Wonder at how this experience will find its way back into the classroom, how it might be taken up in the notebook he will turn to and in which he will record these moments in the woods.

Frog Island

*The water crashes
Against the
cliffs like clouds
crashing against
each other.
Rocks crumble
down the hills.
Water is
calm as the frogs
croak on
the islands, singing
love songs
far across the lake.*

I wonder if on that day in the woods, our community of learners experienced Lee's (in

Lilburn, 2002) “kinaesthesia” with the world. Dennis Lee is a poet who I first encountered in the whimsical books *Alligator pie* and *Garbage delight*, but I have now discovered a richness and depth to his lighthearted words that only comes with knowing something differently. Lee (in Lilburn, 2002) developed the idea of kinaesthesia to reflect a bodily creation of music in the world. He explains that it is the “capacity to register rhythm” (p. 41) where there is not real stimulus to the muscles. The existence of kinaesthesia may “sound like mystification, if it weren’t the normal working experience of many artists” (pp. 41- 42).

This is a new intuition of order: polyvalent and relative. It gives the distinctive cosmophony of modern rhythm. And in ways I can glimpse, if only dimly, it meshes with the account of the world’s coherence, which has emerged in the last century. It resonates with the formal intuitions of relativity and quantum mechanics, where an absolute frame of reference no longer exists (p. 41).

While walking under trees and along the bank of the river, these students and I experienced the cadence of the world. For Lee (2008) cadence is the name given to the “flux, the felt and living flux that poems rise out of” (p. 56). Cadence is the “voice, intuited first without words” (p. 56). Cadence vibrates in that space between the words of the poem and the reader of the poem; it is felt and embodied by the reader. When a poem is written you are trying “to do justice to the way something wants to move” (p. 44), Lee says that “you don’t know what shape” the words will take up, you are only “mucking about” in the “middle” of the words (p. 44).

So how was being in this natural landscape another piece of the assemblage (Bennett, 2008) of events leading to the writing of poetry? How is it the poems appear to speak of the

world? Lee (2008) hints at this when he says,

what leads me to balk is the assumption that decentring monolithic systems is an achievement of postmodern thinkers and artists. Or that it's a human activity at all. In terms of power politics, of course, that's precisely what it is. Every authorized system renders the truths of the marginalized invisible; reclaiming those truths demands a dedicated energy of subversion. But that said, the fact is that we can't decentre the stories. They're already decentered. Polyrhythm precedes us; being is plural, with or without our permission. And the appropriate first response is not irony, nor even struggle, but awe. For polyrhythm is not a human creation. To think otherwise is hubris. (p. 55)

Poetry hearkens back to the human breath of the word when the word was still spoken, when the stories were exchanged orally before stories were created into a "solid form" (Bringhurst, 2006) of literature. Our western cultural stories began in the spoken words of Socrates, Heraclitus, and Homer. First nations and aboriginal storytellers still send their languaged understandings on the air and many a good storyteller recognizes that the story holds onto the world from which it generates. The story told does not detach itself from the experience or the world "as-is" (Zwicky, 2008), it remains rooted in the source of its origin. What poetry, like stories told, tries to name has always been here in the world, "but talking about it, as we are doing here, appears to be a recent aberration" (Bringhurst, 2006, p. 307).

We sing to the mysteries of a poetic shaping of the world everyday. When something is working well we use a metaphor, we say it hums. Bringham (2006) shows us that

song is the silence of poetry. It is not quite the same as the song that the words in the poem make when you read or recite it. It is a song inside that song: one that your mind hears and to which your mind replies, like half a pair of geese honking in counterpoint, as geese routinely do. It is the resonant silence you hear, and the resonant silence you make in return, when you get the poem and the poem gets you. When you really see what it means, what you see is nothing, and the nothing sings a song – one you may want to say you feel instead of hear. (pp. 308-309)

When the poem is felt, embodied, resonating with our bones, we get a moment of light that dwindles on the floor before us. We can glimpse the possibility of a communion with the world, we hear polyphonic humming. Gadamer (1975/2004) reminds us that

our historical consciousness is always filled with a variety of voices in which the echo of the past is heard. Only in the multifariousness of such voices does it exist: this constitutes the nature of the tradition in which we want to share and have a part. Modern historical research itself is not only research, but the handing down of tradition. We do not see it only in terms of progress and verified results; in it we have, as it were, a new experience of history whenever the past resounds a new voice. (p. 285)

Something is shaped differently in our understanding of the world. And that shaping of understanding is not singular, the language spoken in a poem is not the language of just a person or a culture, it is humanity.

If that doesn't happen, literature doesn't happen. But if it does happen, other things speak too. The ecology speaks, for one thing: the community of which that speaker, that culture, this species, this genus all form small concentric parts. The ecology speaks in stories in a least two ways: through lexical reference and through form. It speaks through lexical reference because the world as a whole, addressed through some of its parts, is the subject of every durable story. It speaks through form because the world has form, and the things of the world have all the contributory parts of the form of the world, and the things of the world include languages, their speakers, the thoughts they think and the stories they tell.

(pp. 252-253)

Jane Hirschfield writes the "mind of poetry makes visible how permeable we are to the winds and moonlight with which we share our house" (cited in Zwicky, 2008, p. 16).

And simultaneously along with its 'visibility' is a darkening, an unknowing. We begin to know what it is we do not know and we are "at home" (Lilburn, 1999) with the darkness. Poetry has the effect of a schooling of love or eros. A poetic "way is hermeneutic: a means of comprehending what is incomprehensible, other – the chaos of colour and angle that is the winter branch, the perfect oddness of this particular stone half-covered in exactly this manner with fresh snow" (Lilburn, 1999, p. 35).

Poetry lives in the riparian zone; that space along the riverbank sometimes covered by the river waters, sometimes bared and drying in the sun. Maybe poetry is a languaged way of knowing Berry's (2000) interdependence between "nature and human culture, wildness and domesticity" (pp. 11-12). Again, I cede to the word of Bringhurst (2008).

Like other creatures, humans are heavily self-absorbed. We frequently pretend (or self-righteously insist) that language belongs to humans alone. And many of us claim that the only kind of human language, or the only kind that matters, is the kind that is born in the mouth. The languages of music and mathematics, the gestural languages of the deaf, the class of leopard frogs and whales, the rituals of mating sandhill cranes, and the chemical messages coming and going day and night within the brain itself are a few of the many reminders that language is actually part of the fibre of which life itself is spun. We are able to think about language at all only because a license to do so is chemically written into our genes. The languages we are spoken in are those for which we speak. (pp. 10-11)

Classrooms where writing is stripped from living in the world, siloed in specified time schedules, de-naturalized by mechanistic how-to treatises, produce words that are stilled in the air. A teacher who experiences classroom poetry or writing in assembly-line papers, becomes blind to humans rooted in the world around her. She becomes trapped in the edu-ese of schooling, the language of codes, of outcomes, of timelines, of 'if it is not this then it can only be that'. It is a lonely and singular existence, the life of a modern teacher, caught up in isolated and individually experienced events. We forget

understanding is generated by humanity telling stories together and that humanity does not imply humans alone. Humanity implies humans and all living creatures and living entities assembled together in the world. We forget the language of the world is polyphonic and temporal and shifting all the time.

In an interview with Maya Angelou (2010) about how she came to write poetry she was asked how teachers might support their students in coming to know poetry.

Reading all kinds of poetry and having students read aloud she said,

I give black students Robert Burns to recite, and white students the Southern black poetry to recite, and men women's poetry to recite and women men's poetry, to realize that nothing human should be alien to you. If they can ingest that idea and then go out and proclaim it on the stage, open to the town and the gown, then they go into the science classes with a new view of the subject: Oh, I see human beings did this. Oh, I see since I am doing math and algebra and statistics, I see, these were done by human beings just like me. I see. (pp. 17-18)

Like Angelou, I believe that every language has a melody we are attempting to translate and that "poetry is the human heart speaking in its own melody, in its own language" (p.18).

*Caravans of
alphabetized camel
emerge amid swiftly, sinusoidal sands
In Avicenna's Persia
thousands of books*

*transport thousands of voices
never seen but echoed in pages
across the desert.
Caravans of hormones and enzymes
transport the mind
across the whole body
busily making sense of
catalogued wonders
we name
touch, taste, smell, hearing
and vision.
Caravans of red, plastic bins
align across a
classroom wall
Literacy locked and labeled
AA to Z
Only a brave reader
can rescue a story
from celled categories.*

Gathering on the Yellow Bus

Reader, listen to one more story of the students on the yellow bus.

Josie had collected her sketchbook journal and zip lock baggie of pencils and pencil crayons as soon as she had entered the classroom. They were neatly piled up on her desk beside her wool hat and mittens. Cocooned in a ski jacket, long hair pulled into a pony tail, she leaned towards her two friends and whispered an excitement of the coming day. Her sparrow eyes

darted across the room scanning for any reminders of what she may have forgotten in her preparations for our trip to the wood, returning her attention to her friends she checked that they too were ready.

Josie came to the classroom three days into September and appeared to find herself at home among the community. Like the sparrow who finds refuge in any nook or cranny in the city, she was adept at making new friends without vesting too much of herself into relationships. This was the fourteenth school she had attended in the last five years. She had a lot of practice.

On a warm mid-September evening with the day's heat still lingering cloyingly in the air, I had just opened a classroom window when Josie appeared in the doorway. I ushered Josie and her mother and father to a table set up for our first parent conference. Josie's mother smiled and extended her hand as we introduced ourselves to each other and moved attentively to where Josie drew her by the arm. She was anxious that her mother not miss the artwork she had displayed on her desk. Josie's father pulled a chair from the far side of the table, dragged it close to the classroom door and coyly sat. Head bent he began chewing at a hangnail on his finger. "Don't mind him", the mother stated with disinterest, "he's waiting for a call." Josie's mother continued to attend the proud chatter of her daughter explaining the notebook she was filling with new stories. The father glanced up at me and gave an odd smirk and then resumed his huddled posture working on the skin of the next finger. This was my first alert to the challenged existence of my new student.

The purpose of the conference was to 'get-to-know' Josie from her family's perspective and mom happily extolled the wonders of her daughter, once we were seated together at the table. Mother and daughter exchanged comfortable, knowing glances as mom retold stories of Josie's experiences in the schools she had attended. They giggled together as mom explained how playful and thoughtful Josie was with her younger brother. Josie reminded her mother of the activities she had been able to participate in when they had a home in Vancouver. All the while, dad remained aloof and fidgety, intermittently jumping up to look out the opened window, returning to the chair to resume his savage manicure and never once voicing into the conversation. I was curious about the relationship this man had with his daughter who accepted

his distanced behaviour as quotidian. But, when we were saying our goodbyes, I watched as Josie sidled up beside her father and he wrapped his arm around her drawing her to his side. They smiled warmly at each other and his body shifted into soft angles and gentle motion and then they were gone. And I was perplexed.

A few weeks later I learned that the family of four had been living in their car that September; parking it in different locations throughout the neighbourhood and giving a false address to the school in order to register their children. It also became known that dad was receiving drug rehabilitation counseling at Calgary's Remand Centre, while the rest of the family stayed in a homeless shelter close to the school. And so I worried for and wondered about the future of a bright, articulate, well-read and happy young girl growing up in 'unconventional' circumstances. But, Josie, like a poem, was full of possibilities and possessed an uncanny ability to exist between two seemingly opposed worlds. Her story interrupted the tale I was beginning write of family dysfunction and social deprivation and the long-term effect on child development. Her 'otherness' reminded me of our "permeability to winds and moonlight" (Hirshfield cited in Zwicky, 2008, p. 16) and how we may be "at home with the darkness" (Lilburn, 1999). She is apophatic knowing. She is ineffable.

And what is the elephant?

*In a story of seven blind mice
Each take a turn to travel
And uncover
A part of an elephant
Unknown to them
Together
Share their images
Tell their vision into reality*

And what if the elephant is a zebra?

Reader, the teacher/researcher has one more story to tell.

I remember a couple of months in the fall of 2002 when a school I was working in had some extra money to bring on a literacy specialist. When first asked to meet with this 'expert' in reading and writing, a writer herself who had published a number of treatise on the work of literacy in schools, I was hesitant, to say the least. Her work with our children entailed drawing 'at-risk' students into a small room designated the 'literacy' room and using selected literature to expose the children to a series of calculated lessons designed to increase their vocabulary and hone their reading and writing skills. She visited my classroom and asked about students I felt would benefit from her program. I was working with a number of new English speakers and two 'integrated BA' (behaviour adaptation) kids who she had targeted for assistance, but we decided that all five of the students were comfortable and working well with the language experiences we had established in the classroom, so my teacher-to-teacher relationship ended there. However, she continued to enter my classroom in the early hours of the morning or after the children were dismissed and we continued an odd collegial relationship, sharing good books we were enjoying as voyagers of literature or the struggles we faced when we tried to find the time between our professional lives and our family lives to put a few words to a page. Over time we began to share our understandings of reading and writing in the classroom. She harboured an immense catalogue of poetically worded picture books and willingly shared her precious collection with me. I invited her to sit in a number of book talk sessions with my students and we dialogued about the questions the readers raised and the how readers could travel the literary landscapes being discovered together. Sometimes she would come and write with us and talk about the world of a writer and the strategies she would use to get the best passage down on paper. Or how she would surround herself with the voices of the writers she enjoyed reading; finding the perfect collection of words to shape a particular image she wanted to draw out. And over time I came to recognize that the world of language she existed in and the one I traveled through were not so dissimilar; as language beings we both had some sense that the words were only what provided the frames for the worlds we lived in. And I came to recognize that there were so many bridges between these two ways of knowing our educative landscapes. And, the question is always how to find the middle way. How to

capture the moments of interpretative spaces opening up, how to recognize when they happen.

A person trying to understand something will not resign himself from the start to relying on his own accidental fore-meanings, ignoring as consistently and stubbornly as possible the actual meaning of the text until the latter becomes so persistently audible that it breaks through what the interpreter imagines it to be. Rather, a person trying to understand a text is prepared for it to tell him something. That is why a hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to the text's alterity. But this kind of sensitivity involves neither "neutrality" with respect to content nor the extinction of one's self, but the foregrounding and appropriation of one's own fore-meanings and prejudices. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meaning. (Gadamer, 1975/2004, pp. 268-270)

I want to conclude this work without conclusions, rather I need to gesture to other signposts and routes that may be footed across landscapes we enter with our learners. How is it possible that multiple voices may meet at nodal points along travelled routes and be able to tell polyphonic narratives that shift the stories anew (Arendt, 1969), that transform ourselves as we transform our understandings? I am more curious about the ways we language emergent understandings and knowledge ecologically rooted in communal plains than I am with defining how to 'teach' learners to write a poem. How do we express ourselves remembering that our selves are threaded to humanity? There is no self without other. How do we express ourselves remembering that humanity is rooted in the world? How do we remember there is no humanity without the living earth nestled within the universe?

In the past I was guilty of reading the poems that entered my classroom through the critical lens of the teacher filtered by 'solid' language of 'educationese'. I sieved through files and I interpreted inventories. I held my living poems up to a piercing singular beam of light and any student caught alight upon a dust mote or crouching in a

shadow was identified and coded, stamped as anomaly and programmed separately from the community. I was seeking a monotonic narrative to be told about the classroom. Other voices could only confuse and cause disharmony. But poetry, ahh poetry – it is in our DNA and cannot be denied. It sings the world and eventually demands to be heard. The question is how do we translate the multifarious languages we hear? And, how do we live *at home* with the untranslatable? How can we be *at home* with the ineffable?

For Paula

*Words are for shining like apples
Forms for practice
Forms for imitation
Tracks left at the minds
intersection with breath
Signs that life is lived here
in the world
Rotting
decaying
composting
Shapeshift
through memory
twisted into DNA strands
genetic codes of consciousness
crucible shards and images
fragmented onto pages
Textual internal afterlife
Incestuous spaces between
past and future
to calibrate against
the night sky
the morning sunrise
hardwood forests in fall
grasslands in spring
blue-green icebergs
sand-swept deserts
animal droppings along the trail*

This has been the spring of rain. Walking down a little street of eclectic stores and eateries in Calgary, I was looking for a temporary refuge from a torrential downpour released from the skies. Spying a clerk using her back as a glass door prop and holding a tray before her in offering, I slipped past the girl and into the mezzanine of a chocolate shop. I was assaulted by the sweet smells emanating from the turning vats and melted cocoa. My rain rescuer closed the door and invited me to take a taste challenge comparing locally produced chocolate against a leading brand of expensive supermarket chocolate. Shaking the rainwater from my hands, I looked up at the young woman holding the tray out to me. Her ring-pierced mouth formed a warm smile and our eyes met in a shimmer of recognition. “You look like an old teacher I had,” she recalled, cocking her bandana-clad head to one side. I was instantly hurdled back to the year when Josie graced our classroom. Here was that little girl, grown into a young woman. Here was the little girl who I lost touch with and wondered for so long about her journey. I had last spoken with her mother when I recommended that she register Josie in an art-based learning school in the city in the new school year. Shortly after that meeting, the school office was informed that Josie’s family were no longer living at the location we were given, that maybe they had left the province. I often found myself wistfully ruminating on Josie’s whereabouts and doings. And, how she was.

“Josie”, I exclaimed, “I can’t believe it’s you.” I dove into a series of teacher-ish questions; what have you been up to, what schools did you end up in, what are you doing now? Questions that could be only answered in brief hurried statements as we spoke together in the front of a busy chocolate shop; she moved around a lot after elementary school, she no longer lived with her parents, her father still traveled with his demons. And I spoke quickly of my current work and how her story and her poetry had become important to the tale I was weaving. We both became aware of the queried glances from staff and patrons of the store as we chatted away so we promised to get in touch with each other. But before I left, Josie wanted me to know of an important event in her life. She had recently received confirmation of acceptance to the Alberta College of Art and Design and was anticipating attending in the fall. She was excited.

When the door of the shop closed behind me, I thought about the little girl who sat in front of me on the yellow bus to Fish Creek Park furiously jotting down notes in her writer's journal. I ruminated over the assumptions and stories I told about the experiences we shared in our classroom. I visually shuffled through the ever-thickening Josie-folder I put back in the student-transfer box at the end of the year and I tearfully smiled at the wiles and wonders of the world.

Josie's Poem

*Spring scene
sharp, crisp, sweet,
Popular sap fills my heart
With a warm sense of comfort.
Lovable petite chirping sparrows
flit
through tall canopies of emerald green.
Joyous feelings
send shivers d*

*O
W
N*

*my spine
as furry chattering squirrels
creep up
the rough knarled branches
of the towering popular tree.*

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Appendix I

June 7 [1993]

Ginn and I discussed the focus for next year; what we would be concentrating on. I feel that I need to work more on developing my involvement in programming for math; that would include developing the Kamei ^{math} games as a tool. We based around the idea of developing the program to reflect the ^{hypermathology} continuum outlined by Kamei, Copeland and Taylor & St. Valerie. The program would have to encompass the three main ~~math~~ ^{math}-math areas for pre-math: geometry and measurement. We ~~would~~ ^{could} look at children across the continuum for each of these areas of study. The continuum fits nicely into ~~within~~ the progression of number. We would have to develop ~~something~~ ^{to} continue to fit geo. & measurement. We could develop some diagnostic tests for Lex at the beginning of the year.

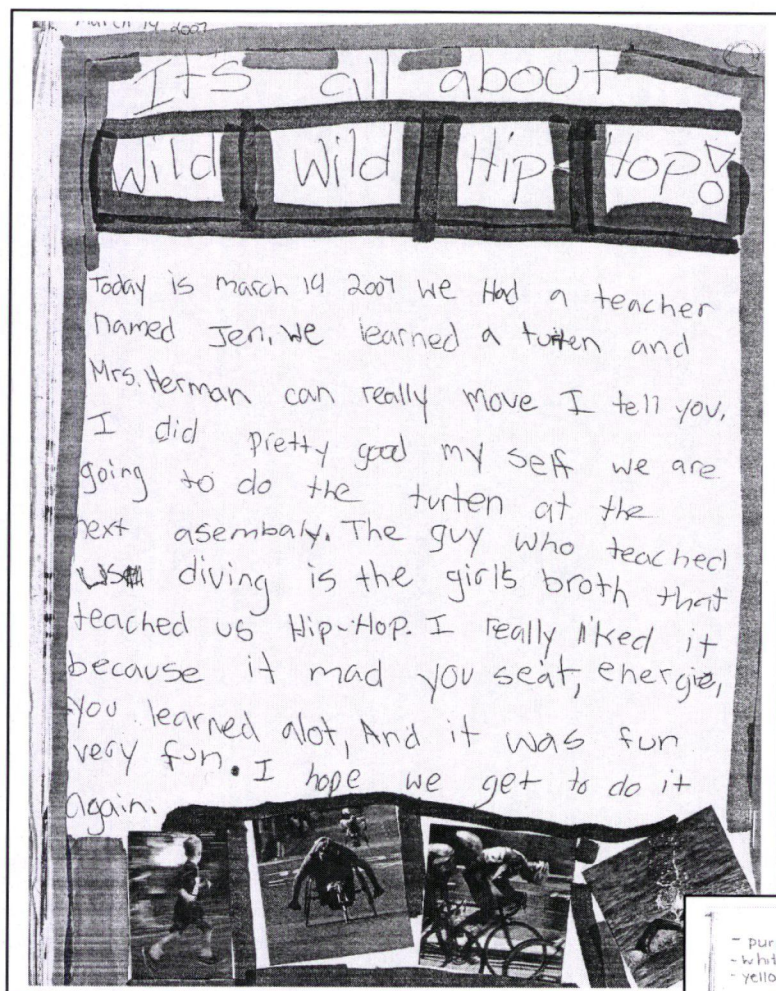
Number - Non-conservers
 Conservers - with manipulates
 Conservers - internalized
 Grouping to 4
 Grouping to 8?
 Revisions.

A notebook entry from my 3rd year in the field of teaching in 1993.

A entry from my present notebook
written in the summer of 2010.

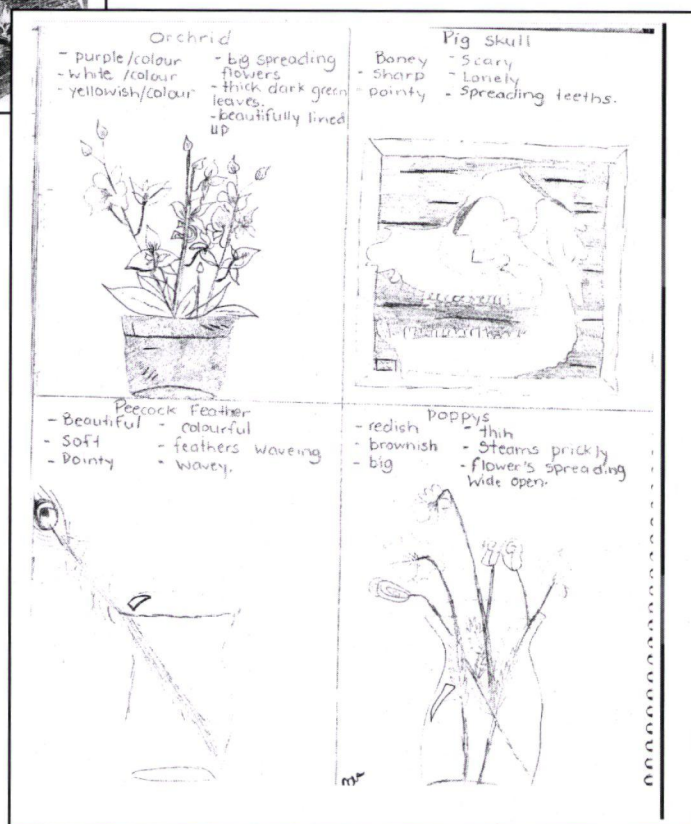
[illegible]

Appendix I



Student notebook entry from the fall of 2007. Our Grade 5/6 learning community spend one week schooling under the dome at Talisman Centre.

Student notebook entry from the spring of 2006. Grade 5/6 community sketching still life and collecting words.



Appendix II

Camels and Books

The Grand Vizier of Persia, Abdul Kassem Ismael didn't want to be parted from his collection of books, so he trained his camels to carry them wherever he went - in alphabetical order. It was in round about 1000 AD.

<http://www.funtrivia.com/askft/Question54878.html>

Abdul Kassam Ismael, Grand Vizier of Persia in the tenth century, carried his library with him wherever he went. Four hundred camels carried the 117,000 volumes.

<http://funnyfact.com/html/117000-Books-on-Camel.html>

In the 10th century, the Grand Vizier of Persia took his entire library with him wherever he went. The 117,000-volume library was carried by camels trained to walk in alphabetical order.

www.britain.tv/...facts/unbelievable_facts_animals.shtml

Abdul Kassam Ismael, Grand Vizier of Persia in the tenth century, carried his library with him wherever he went. Four hundred camels carried the 117,000 volumes.

<http://www.angelfire.com/ok3/clem/amazingindex.html>

Abdul Kassam Ismael, Grand Vizier of Persia in the tenth century, carried his library with him wherever he went. Four hundred camels carried the 117,000 volumes.

<http://fusionanomaly.net/camels.html>

Abdul Kassem Ismael, Grand Vizier of Persia in the tenth century, carried his library with him wherever he went. The 117,000 volumes were carried by 400 camels which were trained to walk in alphabetical order.

<http://www.toytowngermany.com/lofi/index.php/t89864.html>

My favorite library history story is the one of a very special library in Persia back in the first century A. D. The vizier, Abdul Kasem Ismail (938-995), traveled the desert with 400 camels that bore his 117,000 volume library everywhere he went. The animals were trained to walk in an order that ensured the books alphabetical arrangement.

<http://www.henriettahay.com/modern/99mar05.htm>

In the 10th century, the Grand Vizier of Persia took his entire library with him wherever he went. The 117,000-volume library was carried by camels trained to walk in alphabetical order.

http://www.britain.tv/unbelievable_facts/unbelievable_facts_animals.shtml

<http://themonstress.blogspot.com/2010/07/everything-you-never-wanted-to-know.html>

<http://twitter.com/#!/qikipedia/status/68224074131841024>

<http://www.a-website.org/mnemosyne/arrange/pages/4camel.html>

http://www.tillhecomes.org/Text_Sermons/Ephesians/Eph6_14a.htm

slanza.wikispaces.com/file/view/SLANZA+Make+Your+Database+Sing.ppt

<http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/erm003a.pdf>

<http://library.stjosephsea.org/bookmobiles.htm>

<http://www.gather.com/viewArticle.action?articleId=281474979326610>

<http://www.fact-o-matic.com/show/670.html>

<http://www.library.upenn.edu/portal/sustaining/chair2.html>

<http://www.anecdorage.com/index.php?aid=5771>

ro.uow.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1105&context=asdpaper

2001

Academic Services Division

Inside, outside and upside down Felicity McGregor

University of Wollongong, felicity_mcgregor@uow.edu.au

The Library Book

The Story of Libraries from Camels to Computers

Written by Maureen Sawa

Illustrated by Bill Slavin

Category: Juvenile Nonfiction; Juvenile Nonfiction - History

Imprint: Tundra Books

Format: Hardcover

Appendix II

Collette Quinn-Hall

A métissage of poetry, pedagogy, and writing with children

Pub Date: May 2006
Age: 11 UP
Trim Size: 8 x 10
of Pages: 72 pages
ISBN: 978-0-88776-698-5 (0-88776-698-6)

CDN Price: \$24.99 / US Price: \$18.95

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Everyone who has a library card (and those who don't will want one after reading this book) will love this fascinating account of how libraries have evolved. From camels delivering books in Kenya to information compression today, this is a book that's long overdue!

Award-winning librarian Maureen Sawa takes readers on a breathless ride from the origins of libraries to the first bookshelves, from pack-horse librarians in Kentucky to the revolution that was vertical shelving. She presents familiar library heroes like Gutenberg and Benjamin Franklin and the more obscure ones, such as Hypatia, the great female librarian of Alexandria killed by a mob for opposing the teachings of Plato, and Vizier Abdul Kasem Ismail, the Persian bibliophile who traveled with forty camels carrying 117,000 books in alphabetical order.

Libraries, past, present, and future, have a history as fascinating as the books they house. A must-have for every reader!

<http://www.tundrabooks.com/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9780887766985>