

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Generative Curriculum: The Unspeakable?

by

Elaine Demcoe

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE  
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

GRADUATE DIVISION OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

CALGARY, ALBERTA

AUGUST, 2000

©Elaine Demcoe 2000



National Library  
of Canada

Acquisitions and  
Bibliographic Services

395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale  
du Canada

Acquisitions et  
services bibliographiques

395, rue Wellington  
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4  
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-55141-5

Canada

## ABSTRACT

This hermeneutic study interprets the meaning of generative curriculum. It draws on images of classroom practice read through and against philosophy, curriculum theory, literature, poetry and life experience. Resisting the dominant language of technical rationality, this work constructs a different language of curriculum constituted in openness, wonder, play, indeterminacy and familiarity, so that generative curriculum can speak and be spoken. In so doing, this thesis addresses the inherent difficulty and possibility of language and how both inform not only our understanding of generative curriculum but also who we are as teachers.

## DEDICATION

Many thanks to the children who have let their voices be heard. Thank you also to my family for giving me the time to listen to these stories and in understanding my absences from ski trips, golf games, and weekends in general. This has been a difficult undertaking for all of us.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
APPROVAL PAGE .....	ii
ABSTRACT .....	iii
DEDICATION .....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	v
 CHAPTER ONE: RE-THINKING THE QUESTION .....	1
 CHAPTER TWO: RE-MEMBERING HOW TO PROCEED .....	9
The Nature of Understanding: The Role of Tradition ...	9
The Nature of Understanding: The Role of Language .	15
The Nature of Understanding: The Role of Experience	16
Beyond Findings: Toward Understanding: .....	19
All Understanding is Self Understanding.....	21
 CHAPTER THREE: RE-AWAKENING .....	23
The Problem of Foreclosure .....	27
Questioning: The Possibility of Openness .....	34
The Presence of Playfulness .....	40
Wonder: Self-forgetfulness in Learning.....	43
Re-Tracing .....	49

CHAPTER FOUR: RE-VIEWING THE FAMILIAR .....	51
The Familiar Terrain.....	53
The Productive Nature of Disruption .....	60
Re-Calling Curriculum as an Open System .....	65
Re-Tracing .....	68
CHAPTER FIVE: RE-ROUTING CHANCE AND DIRECTION .....	69
Reconsidering the Plan.....	72
Teaching in the Thick of Things .....	76
The Danger of Curriculum as Map .....	79
Re-Tracing .....	82
CHAPTER SIX: RE-FORMING TIME.....	85
A Different Kind of Time .....	89
Dwelling in Conversation .....	93
The Looping Quality of Curriculum.....	95
Responsiveness and Lived Time .....	97
Re-Tracing .....	99
CHAPTER SEVEN: RE-COLLECTING GENERATIVE CURRICULUM	100

CHAPTER EIGHT: IT'S ONLY SEMANTICS, ISN'T IT? .....	105
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	114

## CHAPTER ONE

### RE-THINKING THE QUESTION

*J.R.R. Tolkien in his classic essay "On Fairy Stories" offers the definition that these are not in particular tales about fairies or elves but rather of the land of Faerie: "the Perilous Realm itself, and the air that blows in the country. I will not attempt to define that directly," he goes on, "for it cannot be done. Faerie cannot be caught in a web of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible."*

*(Yolen, 1992, p.1)*

Before me lies a photograph that dates back to my beginning days as an elementary school teacher. As I look at the photograph, I recall how easy it was for me in those days to speak about my work with children. How times have changed! My current practice has come to be associated with the term "generative curriculum", and, for whatever reasons, the ease with which I spoke about teaching at the beginning of my career is no longer available to me. A troubling awareness descends that presents a picture of my professional life as a "half-life", whereby I can do but cannot say. There is a silence around generative curriculum. I am at a loss for words to describe it.

This has put me in a precarious position because on many occasions I have been invited to talk about generative curriculum with colleagues. It is one thing to remain in the relative seclusion of the classroom doing the work without words,



but to be publicly put forward as someone who has something to say about generative practice and not have the words, is disturbing to say the least. Each time I agreed, albeit reluctantly, to participate in these professional dialogues, I felt more and more like a fraud. I felt that if I genuinely understood this phenomenon, I should be able to articulate its character. After each session, I came away increasingly overwhelmed by the frustration that enveloped me.

One such experience occurred recently, when I was asked to present some images of practice that I felt reflected generative curriculum. The image of practice I chose was born out of a newspaper article about a truck accident that occurred during the month of February in southern Alberta. The transport truck had been traveling to the town of Brooks to make a delivery when the weather deteriorated. A high wind rose and blew the truck across the icy highway and into the opposite ditch. The newspaper article directed our classroom work for the next few months. It gave rise to questions, research and discussions among students about community interdependence, Alberta's industry, weather patterns, unsafe road conditions, Emergency Medical Services' response times and so forth. The students were forever bringing related newspaper and magazine articles, books, and maps to class to contribute to the complex matrix of issues that was evolving. Together, our understanding about the province of Alberta grew and multiplied. When I finished telling this story to my colleagues, a teacher asked whether generative curriculum was about studying current issues through newspaper activities? Why was I unable to convey the richness of this

particular experience beyond the level of a “newspaper” or “current affairs” assignment?

Generative learning experiences like this one, that have meant so much to my students and myself, are rendered flat and sequential when I put them into words. A deceptive causality creeps into the telling that imbues the stories with a cleanliness that was not the lived experience. In the telling, the stories are given a linear structure and the teacher seems to accrue too much credit in its orchestration. The telling smoothes the story yet it is on bumpy terrain that the story is actually lived out. Even in speaking directly about the bumps, their convoluted contours, their depth and pitfalls, their interconnectedness, the learners' experiences become streamlined into a simple causal pattern of teacher does this and then this happens. For the most part, when I speak about generative curriculum, listeners get a sense, at some level, of what's going on in the classroom, who's doing what and how, and to some extent why, but still, I know my words do not tell enough. I am somehow complicit in perpetuating the silence.

In the past, I have been quick to blame myself for not having the right words. I thought that if only I had the right words, then perhaps the listeners would be able to get a better sense of the excitement, sense of community, involvement, deep thought and interest that are central to generative curriculum.

Characteristics, I thought, to be obvious in the foregoing image of practice. I am

beginning to wonder though if my frustration with language extends beyond this paucity of words. There is another dimension to the frustration I feel that has to do with how the listener takes up the words I speak. A prevalent response to images of practice seems to be the tendency to want to name it as an example of something familiar: “as if it is current affairs”, “as if it is a newspaper activity”. There seems to be a pervasive desire to reduce the image of practice to one label, to one thing. In doing so, one aspect of the image gets highlighted and privileged while all others are dismissed and forgotten. I often wonder if the other dimensions are even noticed at all. Is it the case that the listener chooses to dismiss the other dimensions as unimportant or is it that they evade the listener’s attention altogether? It is exasperating when a label is pasted too quickly onto these images of practice. The chance for conversation no longer exists. The label gives a sense of that generative curriculum is pre-determined, hence there is nothing left to say. What seems to occur are two parallel monologues, one trying to describe images of practice, the other busy layering the image with a phrase or a word that smoothers and robs the image of its vitality. Often the labeling is closely followed by the declaration, “If that’s what generative curriculum is, then I’m doing it already!” When this happens conversation becomes mired in “how guilty education is for faddish jargon” and “why can’t we just stick with the old words” and “what comes around goes around” and “there’s nothing new under the sun”... “It’s all semantics!”

When I try to speak about my practice, too much is left unspoken, too much is left unheard. I am perplexed by the inadequacy of the words I use but equally perplexed by how these words are taken up by the listener. There is a kind of listening that contributes to the silence around generative curriculum. The silence does not reside solely in the telling but how that telling is apprehended. Both the speaker and the listener are implicated. It feels as though language gets in the way.

At first, it struck me as ironic that generative curriculum, given that “generative” enjoys an etymology tied to notions of “procreation” and “production”, “strength”, “potentiality” and “vigour” (Kuhn, 1963, p.68), would suffer from a serious shortage of words. It is a situation that has me confused and frustrated. I wonder whether my silence is the opening through which generative curriculum might reveal itself. What is it about language that keeps generative curriculum hidden from view? Conversely, what does generative curriculum have to say about language? As I think further on the etymology of “generative”, I am reminded that other words and phrases like “miracle”, “wondrous deeds”, “unusual ability”, “miraculous power” are part of its history (Kuhn, 1963, p.68). There is something about language that shrouds generative curriculum in a cloak of silence. Perhaps its silence will be the opening through which miraculously generative curriculum will be revealed. Generative curriculum has, for quite some time, refused to be bound and shackled by language I have at my disposal. There is something

about the words I use that implicates me in the silence around generative curriculum.

Although the topic of generative curriculum has long been with me and has directed and shaped my thesis work for some time, it is only recently, as my concern over language has strengthened, that my inquiry around generative curriculum seems genuine. Until recently, I suspect I have been masquerading as an inquirer of generative curriculum. It has not been about deepening my understanding. It has not been about pushing the boundaries of my current understanding. It has been about substantiating what I already know by turning to “the experts” for affirmation. I did not understand the role “language” would ultimately play in my inquiry.

I have come to this work carrying with me two unproductive beliefs. One, that somehow I already knew generative curriculum and two, there are voices of authority on the subject that I simply needed to access in order to prove my thinking right. This thesis then would simply be a matter of cutting and pasting expert ideas onto my practice. This was the milieu in which I initially tried to complete this work. Underlying these beliefs was a particular conception of knowing that brought my work to a crippling standstill.

I brought to this work a conception of understanding that is closely aligned with Plato's notion of correspondence where “Truth became correct seeing, and thinking became a matter of placing an idea before the mind's eye, that is, it

became the proper manipulation of ideas" ...“When thinking is defined as manipulation of ideas and concepts it is no longer creative” (Palmer, 1969, pp. 142-146). Thinking becomes a matter of correctness. My early attempts at this work were not about the creation of but a search for experts with the correct ideas about generative curriculum, ideas that corresponded with my practice.

To question genuinely, says Gadamer (1998) means to “bring into the open. The openness of what is in a question consists in the fact that the answer is not settled” (p. 363). The most prominent question guiding my work to date has been where can I find evidence to support my thinking on generative curriculum. Armed with such evidence I could then, at last, convey the meaning of generative curriculum to my colleagues:

“In order to be able to question one must will to *know* and that means however to know that you do not know.” When one knows he does not know and when he does not therefore through method assume that he only needs to understand more thoroughly *in the way he understands*, then he acquires the structure of openness characterizing authentic questioning (Palmer, 1969, p.198).

It is the frustration with my inability to convey what I do that has led me to question genuinely: What is the relationship between language and generative curriculum that makes speaking about the latter so difficult?

To explore this question, I return to the ground on which generative curriculum was played out: to stories from my own classroom. This time, listening more attentively to what they have to say about curriculum. I wonder, however, if like the land of the Faerie, one of generative curriculum's qualities is its indescribability or is the silence a sign of something else? Is there something perhaps about the dominant curriculum practice in schools that also contributes to the silence? This thesis is an attempt to generate a language that will reflect the unique hues and tones of generative curriculum, to let it speak and be spoken, at least for now.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RE-MEMBERING THE WAY TO PROCEED

*And so each venture  
Is a new beginning, a raid on the  
inarticulate  
.....  
There is only the fight to recover what has  
been lost  
And found again and lost again; and now,  
Under  
conditions  
That seem unpropitious . But perhaps  
neither gain nor loss.  
For us, there is only the trying*

(Eliot, 1978, p. 110)

#### The Nature of Understanding: The Role of Tradition

I have been working on this thesis for a long time and have often felt incredible frustration with what I have perceived as slow progress. The limited number of pages written has been a relentless source of tension and angst. Recently, however, it dawned on me that the months that have slipped away have not been lost or wasted. They have been months in which I have been working through the traditions that have stamped my writing with an impersonal shallowness. It was my intent upon entering this work to engage in qualitative research within the theoretical framework of hermeneutics. In a general sense hermeneutics is about making sense of the world we live in through interpretation. Doing this



work has been far more difficult than I ever anticipated. The previous understandings we bring to a situation is described hermeneutically as the process of tradition, which Gadamer (1998) considers a vital living presence that enters all understanding. It has been in the context of attempting this work that I have come face to face with the traditions that shape who I am and how I understand the world. Understanding the world is not an innocent endeavour for it is always carried out from within tradition. "We are always situated within traditions, and this is no objectifying process---i.e., we do not conceive of what tradition says as something other, something alien. It is always part of us..." (Gadamer, 1998, p. 282). By addressing this feeling of spinning my wheels, the sense of moving no further forward with this work, I have had to face my own prejudices embedded within the traditions I carry. "A tradition is not some bygone body of knowledge... that is objectively arrogated in theoretical or technical appropriateness... it is something we take up and live in real application to our circumstances" (Gallagher, 1992, p.156). Participation in this work has awakened me to the need to take up not only those traditions that inform my current understanding of generative curriculum, but also those that also constitute my thinking about research.

In doing this work, I have uncovered how deeply the technical rationalist tradition has shaped my understandings of research and what it means to be a researcher. Even my understanding of progress as a researcher has been construed within this powerful framework. Narrowly defining progress as the

number of pages completed ignores a vital aspect of what this undertaking has been about for me. An important aspect of this thesis is the learning that has evolved through being addressed by, and acknowledging the traditions I bring with me. I have brought to this work a proclivity toward “correctness”, “reductionism” and “distancing”, traits that do not belong to hermeneutics but about which hermeneutics speaks. My conceptualizations of what it means to do research and to be a researcher clearly shows how these characteristics initially informed how I took up this work. Shaped and guided by these characteristics, the technical rational tradition conditioned me to proceed in a particular way that has not been productive in this thesis. In a very real sense, I have been the greatest obstacle to generating the pages I have so desired. It has been through taking up the traditions, rather than ignoring them, that I have found the impetus to move forward. Time has been needed to work out what it means to engage in interpretive inquiry and to reconstitute myself as a researcher.

For months, I wanted to keep generative curriculum at arms length, looking at it from afar, harbouring the belief that somewhere out there existed a true definition of generative curriculum. I simply had to find it and graft it on to what I knew about curriculum. I lived with the tension of simultaneously believing that I knew generative curriculum while at the same time succumbing to the notion that others knew more, knew better, knew the right answer. I found myself turning to the “experts” for “answers” at the expense of my own knowledge and experiences. I wanted to rely on and consume the words and the ideas of others

as though they possessed the truth about generative curriculum and by swallowing their ideas, somehow I too, would be in the know. I was reluctant to turn my attention to my own experience and knowing. Consequently, I have been noticeably absent in my efforts to further my own understanding. I entered this work wanting to stay on the sidelines like a spectator rather than a player in the game.

I wanted this work to be clean, straightforward and shied away from involving the complex, messiness that is my work with children. I was looking for what Jardine (1994) calls the “patriarchal voice” to make sense of generative curriculum for me. Jardine (1994) points out that there is no such authority “who will speak or read or interpret this text(ure) on my behalf or yours”(p. ix). Interpretation “can only be taken up by each one of us starting from the life we actually live” (Jardine, 1994, p. ix). I have been guilty of looking to others to do my thinking for me. I have been looking for easy answers.

Hermeneutics, says Caputo (1987), must resist “the course of metaphysics which since its inception, and in accord with the inclination inscribed in factual life itself, has been making light of the difficulty in existence” (p. 1). In interpretive work, it is the researcher’s task to resist the desire to smooth things over to make things seem easy, to provide the answer. Interpretive work, says Caputo (1987), involves restoring “factual existence to its original difficulty” (p.1). I have had to abandon the futility and artificiality of trying to erase or ignore the difficulties and

the messiness inherent in this work to furthering my understanding. The way this work has intruded and insinuated itself into every aspect of my life has, at times, been difficult. I have been permanently at its beck and call. Conversely, having to do this work in the midst of family illness, deaths of friends and three job changes is very much part of life's difficulties. "Interpretive inquiry is an attempt to express how things already stand with us in the world, how we are already right in the middle of things" (Jardine, 1994, p. 69). To engage in interpretive work is to embrace, remember and honour the ambiguity and complexity of the living world. It is not about the removal of life's bumps and warts to discover the truth.

Interpretive research departs significantly from the conceptualization of research that characterizes the technical rationalist research paradigm. The latter works to eradicate the "contaminants" that the researcher brings to the process. In interpretive research, the researcher's previous experiences are considered important shaping powers in the interpretive process. However, the search for untainted, objective research still continues. The myth that it is achievable persists. Since we as researchers are inextricably involved in the process, and do not come to it presuppositionless, totally sanitized, unbiased research is not attainable. I am implicated in this work and cannot by some "Cartesian side step" (Gallagher, 1992, p. 91) remove myself from the process to achieve an unsullied version of truth. Yet I must confess it has been difficult for me to see my experiences as openings through which I can question and enhance understanding. I struggled to reorient myself and bring myself into this work.

Coming up against and breaking through the boundaries of the technical rational tradition has been my undertaking this long while. I have become personally acquainted with the principle of historical effect (Gadamer, 1998), which states “understanding is essentially a historical event”(Gadamer, 1998, p. 300). This work has been a process of self-discovery as I am made aware of prejudices I carry with me from my past, prejudices that feature prominently in negotiating new understandings. “Understanding,” says Gallagher (1992), “even if in the form of sudden insight, does not develop from out of nowhere without basis; its ground is always prepared in a past which we carry around with us”(p. 90). I found myself time and time again coming up against the pervasiveness of objectivism as it insidiously shapes how I take up this work, how I encounter and understand the world. It is the terrain of my technical rational past that I keep stumbling upon as I continue this thesis. As I proceed, no doubt I will come up against other preconceptions of which I am presently unaware. Gadamer (1998) reminds us “the prejudices and fore-meanings that occupy the interpreter’s consciousness are not always at his disposal. He cannot separate in advance the productive prejudices that enable understanding from the prejudices that hinder it and lead to misunderstandings” (p. 295). The hermeneutic task is to identify which prejudices are productive to understanding and which are not. Sorting through my prejudices as they relate to my understanding of research has for some time preoccupied my thoughts and played a paradoxical role in both delaying and advancing my understandings.

There is a duality to the role that our previous understanding plays. Tradition and preconceptions both constrain and liberate understanding. It has been in doing this work that the transparency of my own preconceptions has been, and will continue to be made visible. My preconceptions will be rendered either as a help, or as a hindrance, to both my understanding of research and generative curriculum. Already, I have come up against certain preconceptions that have been initially non-productive to my work. However, it would be erroneous for me to cast these preconceptions as antagonists in this thesis narrative, for it is from attending to them and taking them up that my understanding of research has deepened. Scheffler states “to learn is to enter into traditions, to inherit them and to participate in the never ending work of testing, expanding and altering them for the better” (in Gallagher, 1992, p. 100). Language is what makes it possible for us to enter into traditions. Language is the vehicle of tradition and in that role introduces bias into interpretation. Because of its relationship to interpretation language is a concern of hermeneutics.

### The Nature of Understanding: The Role of Language

Language, like tradition, both limits and enables understanding. Language is not something we have complete control over; in some ways it has control over us (Gadamer, 1998). There exists a reciprocal relation between ourselves and tradition, and ourselves and language. Although traditions and language are created and changed by us, they too, create and change us. I need look no further than how the technical rationalist paradigm shaped me as a researcher, to

know I am every bit as much being acted upon by tradition and language, as the one doing the acting. The language I use to try to unravel this phenomenon holds clues not only about generativity, but also about the “technical rational me” through the traditions that are reflected in the language that both shapes and conveys my work. Interpretive work requires the researcher to be sensitive to language. The silence of generative curriculum is tied to language. To do this work well necessitates attentiveness to the language I use to take up each story of practice. It is ironic that my “raid against the inarticulate” (Eliot, in Gardner, 1978, p. 110) has to be worked out within language and that my understanding of it is shaped by language.

#### The Nature of Understanding: The Role of Experience

It is with this in mind that I return to my classroom practice to revisit and reconsider familiar stories. The stories I take up in this work have been told by me before, but in their telling I have held them out as examples of particular somethings. In the past, I have read their text from within the boundedness of the technical rational paradigm, yielding a very particular kind of interpretation. I return to these stories now not “as examples of” but for what they might be able to tell me, if I listen carefully. I return to them with my ear attuned to what they have to say about generative curriculum.

I have purposely chosen the stories of practice that appear in the following chapters to open up the phenomenon of silence around generative curriculum.

However, it would be incorrect to contend that it was I who, unilaterally, made the selection. In a very real sense, these stories have actually made a claim on me. It is odd that these experiences, from all the possibilities, are the ones that have remained with me. “We do not have a memory for anything and everything,” says Gadamer (1998), only certain things not others” (p.16). What is it about these particular memories? Why do they persist in demanding attention?

It worried me that I was locating this work in memory. I wondered if perhaps research was not the place to dredge up old memories. “It is time,” says Gadamer (1998) “to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man [sic]” (p. 16). I cannot afford to discount my memories as unimportant, for they played a hand in constituting who I am, and they will not let me forget it. Each remembered story of practice brings its own uniqueness, yet, embedded within its text are the echoes of each of the others, reflecting “the amorphous web of interconnected meanings” (Jardine, 1992, p. 52) of which they are a part.

Although interpretive work begins in “the unmethodological instances” (Jardine, 1992, p. 51) of our lives, I have to admit that I worried about embarking into an inquiry through an interrogation of my own practice. I worried that it might degenerate into narcissistic, self-indulgent reminiscences. In re-visiting these stories of practice I must remember that the particular stories told, must bear forward the phenomenon of generative curriculum. So although this work is



inextricably linked to me, it cannot be about me. It is about that which I have certain experiences and knowledge (Jardine, 1992, p. 57-58). I cannot allow myself to fall under the spell of insularity, thinking about my practice as though it stands alone, lacking any ancestral heritage, for it is embedded in a complex quiltedness of kinships and traditions. Interpretive research is an invitation to take up experiences of practice as a means of furthering my understanding. However, returning to experiences will not be enough. Although hermeneutics values experience it does not mistake it for understanding. Understanding does not rest solely with experience itself but through interpreting the experience back through the matrix of interconnectedness of which it is a part. It will be up to me to read my lived experiences back to the history, cultures and traditions of the world; otherwise they will simply remain just other stories of experience. The “fecundity” (Jardine, 1992) of each particular image of practice will be its ability to evoke and generate new meaning and understanding about generative curriculum.

By inviting the voices of others into the conversation about generative curriculum, by taking up the traditions that shape understanding, there seems to be a greater chance that understanding will be deepened. This work cannot be a regurgitation of the work of the “experts” nor, however, can I afford to ignore that work. “Interpretations are never simply repeat, copy, reproduce, reconstruct or restore the interpreted in its originality” (Gallagher, 1992, p.128). Interpretation is about creating something new. “The work of interpretive research is to provoke

new ways of seeing and thinking, within a deep sense of tradition, to bring about new forms of engagement and dialogue about the world we face together” (Blum in Smith, 1991, p. 202). In this case, newness will come about through reading my experiences through and against those other voices instead of positioning them as absolute authorities over my work. This movement back and forth between experience, personal knowing and tradition, and the thoughts and understanding of others, is, according to Heidegger (1962) and Gadamer (1998), what it means to engage in interpretation. In this process a new fore-structure is created which becomes the ground upon which further understanding is constructed.

#### Beyond Findings: Toward Understanding

The intent of this thesis is not to produce findings earmarked with certitude and definitiveness but to open up the possibility of further dialogue. This is not the first, nor will it be the last, conversation about generative curriculum. Each conversation reconstitutes the topic under inquiry. “Essential to an experience is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as meaning...one is never done with it “(Gadamer, 1998, p. 67). Upon its completion, this work will become one more story to add to the larger unfolding one of generative curriculum. When this work is complete, the whole of this phenomenon will still to be given (Jardine, 1994, p. xxi). The conversation will go on.

The technical rationalist paradigm presents “findings” as the final word from a univocal, authoritative perspective. It is for this I have been searching. Perhaps this delusion extends even further, for it seems to me that I embarked upon the work with the misguided assumption that, upon its conclusion, I would have written the definitive rendering of generative curriculum. Interpretive research rejects this notion of finality and embraces the notion that understanding is always under construction; there is no final destination point characterized by complete understanding.

We live in a world in which we never completely know what will follow, so we can never fully know what this particular, stubborn thing now before us essentially is, because we never fully know what will be made of it, what will come of it (Jardine, 1994, p. xxvi).

In doing this work, I have had to confront my own predilection for neatness and finality. I continue to catch myself thinking of this work as a problem-solving exercise, with the hope of rendering my inability to articulate my practice solvable and fixable. I have brought to this work a biased view of what the finished product should be. The conception of product that I carried with me does not belong in interpretive work. The truth is: I do not know where this work will lead me or when I might stumble over something that will contribute to my understanding and, therefore, will deserve a place within these pages.

Quite recently, I was in the staff room with several teachers who were engaged in conversation about quilting. This is a group that comes together regularly to

share their quilting expertise, to help one another. This particular day one of the teachers was beginning a new quilt and was seeking advice from the others about the placement of the fabric remnants. Their worry over the placement of each piece reflected their concern for the whole quilt. The success of the whole would depend on the masterful placement of each little scrap of fabric in relation to all the other little scraps of fabric, none more important than any other piece, each responsible to the success of the entire quilt. One misplaced piece, one forgotten piece and the whole quilt would be jeopardized. In listening to their conversation I was struck by the similarity of their undertaking to my own, as I work to stitch together stories of practice to create a telling of generative curriculum. Keiji reminds us that “not a single thing comes into being without some relation to everything” (In Jardine, 1994, p. xvii ). It will be in the skill and artistry of placing the story scraps along side one another that generative curriculum will unfold. It will be in the interconnectedness between and among the fragments that the larger story of generative curriculum will evolve. The words I use to piece and weave them together will be the threads that will evoke the quilt’s uniqueness.

### All Understanding is Self-Understanding

Participating in this journey of interpretive work has changed me. It has gifted me with a different understanding of understanding. Regardless of my desire to finish this piece of work quickly, to get it over and done with, Hermes has not allowed this. I was to be reminded again and again that understanding does not

arrive according to some specified schedule, but in its own time, paying little heed to our own desires and actions to attain it. "Interpretation consists of an interchange that involves not only a questioning of the subject matter between interpreter and the interpreted but a self questioning. The questioning is not just unidirectional or monologic; it is reflective and dialogical" (Gallagher, 1992, p.157). Jardine (1994) says interpretive work is about "constantly" losing the thread" and finding it again, looping it back and forth" (p. vi). At times I have been tied in knots. At times I have felt as though I have been living in a maze, taking paths that lead nowhere, or conversely, stumbling across an unanticipated opening that leads somewhere. It is in this field of openings and blockages that understanding happens. It is in living and working my way through the maze that furthering my understanding stands a chance. "To reach an understanding ...is not merely a matter of putting oneself forward and successfully asserting one's own point of view, but being transformed into a communion in which we do not remain what we once were" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 379). It has been a lesson in humility and patience, at times painful, at times joyful.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RE-AWAKENING QUESTIONING, WONDER AND PLAY

*There was a child went forth every day,  
And the first object he took upon, that object he became,  
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain*

*part of the day  
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.*

*The lilies became part of the child,  
And the grass and white and red morning-glories, and white and red  
clover, and the song of the pheobe bird'  
And the third month lambs and the sow's pink fat litter, and ...*

(Walt Whitman, 1996, p. 386)

*"Mrs. Demcoe, can I change my topic? I don't like this one."*

*"Brett, you've been working on this for two weeks. What is it that you don't like?"*

*"I'm not getting any new information. Everything I read about wolves I already  
know. It's boring."*

*It had been almost three weeks since the research project had been introduced  
and the information to parents sent home. The suggested timeline for completion  
was ticking away. I glanced at the wolf books piled on his desk, the pictures he  
had collected, the maps showing wolf locations around the province, all of which  
had been assembled for the display he was making as part of his presentation to  
the class.*

*"What would you rather research?"*

*"What would you rather research?"*

*"That's the problem," he answers. "I don't have anything else in mind."*

*"This is a difficult thing you're asking me, Brett. If there was something else you were dying to know about, then I'd say sure. Since you don't, my suggestion is to stick with it." I can tell Brett is less than thrilled with my suggestion and if I am honest with myself, so am I.*

*Over the next two days I watch Brett go through the motions of putting together his display. The normal animation that I have come to expect from Brett is noticeably lacking. The sparkle has been missing for a while. I make my way over to where he's busy cutting, gluing and arranging his artifacts and utter encouraging comments about how attractive his display is.*

*"It will be better tomorrow when I bring in my wolf skin. Actually its my grandfather's," he says cheerfully. "He's letting me borrow it for a while." I try to convince myself that perhaps Brett is finding the wolf topic satisfying after all.*

*The next morning the first body through the classroom door is Brett followed by a horde of his classmates. He hurtles his way to my desk carrying his grandfather's wolf skin. "I've got it," he says through his face splitting grin.*

*Thinking he's talking about the pelt, I gesture toward it and invite him to show it to me. By this time there are no less than seven awestruck grade three children, gathered at my desk, to get a look at "a real live wolf skin." Amidst squeals of "Cool!" "Can I touch it?" "You're so lucky!" Brett says, "No, not that Mrs. Demcoe. I mean I've got my research project, my real one. Ponch manure. Can I do it, Mrs. Demcoe? Can I?"*

*The number of faces at my desk has now swollen, to a hundred it feels, but I know logically that can't be so. The phone rings. "Brett, I'll talk to you after I take this call." Meanwhile, Kathy Parks, my teaching partner, is efficiently dispersing the crowds with assurances that Brett will probably allow them to feel the wolf skin later. "Get settled at your desks," I hear her say, "so I can take attendance." She convinces Brett that he too should go to his desk and that I'll speak with him after talking with whoever is on the phone.*

*"Good morning. Elaine Demcoe speaking."*

*"Hi Elaine! It's Sylvie Johnson. Has Brett spoken to you yet?"*

*"He hasn't really had a chance other than to tell me he's interested in ponch manure?"*

*"I know it sounds ridiculous. But this morning he was looking through the newspaper and he came across this article on ponch manure. Seemingly there is a community in South-east Calgary that is objecting to having this stuff disposed of in the Sheppard Landfill Site."*

*"What is this ponch stuff anyway?"*

*"The stomach contents of a cow." A small groan escapes from my lips to which Sylvie replies, "My reaction exactly. But Brett is enthralled with knowing more about his stuff and wants to do it as his research project. I know the due date is fast approaching but is there any chance of an extension?"*

*"The sign-up for the presentations is the day after tomorrow. We'll only be able to listen to about three or four a day anyway. If Brett signs up for a spot near the*



*end everything should work out. He should have about two more weeks but he'll have to do some of the work at home."*

*"Great. One more thing, and I hate to ask this, but is it all right if I take him out of school a couple of mornings this week to do his research? Since reading this article this morning his mind hasn't stopped making plans. He wants to start by interviewing some of the people in the affected community, as well as the people at the landfill site. Then to use his words "We'll see where that leads me."*

*I chuckle at this because these are the exact words Kathy has used when talking about the research process with the children. "Taking him out of school for a few hour is not a problem. Many of the children have gone with their parents to interview people during regular school hours."*

*The conversation comes to an end and I walk toward Brett's desk. He is already lost in the adventures of Big Red. He looks up. "Ponch manure?" My face grimaces as I say the words.*

*He laughs. "It will be so cool."*

It would be easy to dismiss this incident as simply a student's dwindling interest in his chosen topic, and his desire to move on to something new and exciting. It would be easy to read this text as the familiar tale of a child's inability to take a project to its conclusion. How many times after all have I been in the position of cajoling, encouraging, threatening, albeit mildly, to get children, both my own and others'; to bring their work to completion. Brett's story has something to say, I think, about why this situation arises in a classroom. I suspect that sedimented

within, are pedagogical insights, and a wisdom about curriculum from which I can learn. Brett knows something about what does and does not make learning wonder-ful. If I listen carefully to Brett what will he reveal about wonder-ful learning experiences.

It is clear from the story that Brett is not happy with his “wolf” topic yet is ecstatic about the thought of studying “ponch manure”. Does this suggest that perhaps there is something inherently bad about the topic of wolves but good with respect to ponch manure? What makes wolves “bad” and ponch manure “good”? Can it be assumed that wolves is a wonder-less topic while ponch manure is wonder-full? Brett would likely answer “yes” to the above. However, I am not sure pitting one topic against the other, declaring one topic better than the other, will enlighten us in any meaningful way. There is more to be gained by taking the discussion beyond the dichotomous either or proposition and consider the quality of Brett’s relationship to each of the topics. What is it that Brett finds boring about wolves? What is it about studying ponch manure that holds such high appeal for Brett?

### The Problem of Foreclosure: A Different Kind of Knowing

When Brett chose wolves as his topic he did so with an extensive knowledge base already in place. Before he even started his project he could rattle off all sorts of wolf facts and information. Wolves had intrigued him for a long time. I had taught Brett in grade one and his interest in all animals, but especially

wolves, had surfaced early in our relationship. He had long been fascinated with wolves, but now, as he worked on his grade four research project, his enthusiasm began to wane. His dissatisfaction had something to do with his belief that there was no more information to be gained. He knew from the outset how many different types of wolves lived in Alberta. He knew about their habitat, food, enemies, special adaptations, the social hierarchy within the pack as well as the locations of the various packs in the province. Brett began his project already knowing the answers to the questions he had posed.

When Brett reached the conclusion “I am not getting any new information”, he is saying more than he knows a lot about wolves. He is demonstrating a particular way of knowing wolves that reflects a particular orientation, toward knowing and knowledge. This orientation has well established roots that stretch all the way back to Ancient Greece, its lineage has appeared in many epistemological theories since. Knowledge, reflected within this orientation, stems from the objectification of the world that demands “a severance of our relationship to the earth and each other” (Jardine, 1994, p. 28). It is a form of knowledge, housed within the parameters of clarity and distinctness, that stands in stark contrast to alternative perspectives that consider the world as “not populated by separate, substantial, self-existent univocal objects but a nest of interweaving ambiguous kinds” (Jardine, 1994, p. 21). Brett’s wolf undertaking resonates with “clarity”, “distinctness” and “certainty”. For Brett, the sum total of wolf facts was the same

as knowing wolves. This kind of knowing is a fragmented and disconnected kind of knowing, set apart and distinct from Brett himself.

I recognize in Brett's attempts to take up wolves my own initial attempt to know generative curriculum. The belief that what is to be known is an object that can be mastered, permeated Brett's and my own conception of knowing. Both of us attempted to take up our topics as finite concepts with the intent of exposing their defining characteristics. At the conclusion of our work we would be able to pass on the correct, salient facts and information to others so they too would be in the know. For me this particular way of knowing has long been with me. I remember quite clearly learning and being taught concepts as if they were a list of facts and definitions. As long as I could recite dates with battles, dates with treaty signings, dates with significant inventions, then my knowledge of world history was deemed satisfactory. I remember writing reports that amounted to reproducing, "in my own words", information usually found in the Encyclopedia Britannica. This particular way of knowing served me well in school as I was always ranked near "the top of my class". This transmission model of teaching and learning, where information from a particular source is installed in the learner, continued throughout my teacher education courses. Method courses immediately come to mind with their potpourri of engaging poetry and spelling activities, great craft ideas to be used when teaching the pioneer unit, and countless numbers of handouts on fun ways to teach place value.

This “banking model” of instruction (Freire, 1970, pp 58-74) continues to enjoy a firm foothold in the field of education. Tyler’s (1949) conception of curriculum, with orderly sequencing of content toward preset ends, reflects this kind of orientation toward teaching and learning. Curriculum of this sort rests on the theoretical foundation that knowledge can be handed over to the learner who becomes knowledgeable when he or she duplicates that which has been deemed important by the teacher and others. It is the blueprint model of curriculum where instruction begins with a plan for how the student will turn out. Egan suggests that this particular framework is derived from industrial models.

For example, we seem to take for granted that teaching can best be organized to produce learning in much the same way as an assembly line can be organized to produce cars. Thus we are told to begin with a precise statement of our objectives, just as an industrial planner provides a detailed plan for a new model of car. Then we are told to gather our materials or the content of our lesson or unit, just as an industrial planner must ensure the supply of materials for the assembly line. Then we are told to decide on the methods we will use in conveying content, just as an industrial planner arranges the various subskills needed along the assembly line. And at the end we need to evaluate how well our objectives were achieved, just as a quality control officer climbs into a car at the end of an assembly line to see whether the car works. (Egan, 1989, p. 458)

This leads to a curriculum characterized by duplicity and instrumentality.

Curriculum of this sort perpetuates the great pretense that the world can be methodologically handed over through the stasis of objectivism.

An image comes to mind of the caretaker sitting on “the teacher chair” with my grade one class sitting at his feet. Written on the chart paper are the questions the children have brainstormed, prior to his arrival, that they are now going to ask. Since all the questions they had generated could not be asked part of the process involved choosing the best questions. “Together”, the children and I, decided which questions to ask. I managed to ensure the questions that were chosen all aligned perfectly with my preset, curricular objectives. All the personal questions about the caretaker himself were eliminated because they really did not meet my purpose. In truth, the visit by the caretaker was a totally unnecessary part of the lesson. The questions were structured, by me, in such a way as to elicit the “correct response” to suit my curricular agenda. Anyone could have answered the questions in virtually the same manner. The caretaker was rendered knowable as a predefined entity.

Both Brett and I participated in a similar process of manipulation in our own research. We came to our “inquiry” with a preset end in mind. Our research involved spewing back already predigested information gathered from “recognized sources”. “It makes a great deal of difference whether thinking is conceived strictly in ideational terms, for then we are no longer dealing with

unknown matter but with clarification and evaluation of already known data” (Palmer, 1969, p.146). This objective knowing, in conjunction with the specific, expected outcomes, positioned us as learners so we stood apart and distanced from our respective topics. We apprehended it in such a way as to reflect back a static reality. The process eventually became a source of dissatisfaction for both of us. For Brett it manifested itself in the form of boredom. For me it came as a sense of “spinning my wheels”.

“In order to be able to question,” writes Gadamer (1998) “one must will to know and that means however to know that you do not know” (p. 363): Neither Brett or I entered from this position. The structure of openness, characterizing authentic questioning, is dependent on the realization that not only does one not know but in order to know one must know differently (Palmer, 1969, p.198). Neither in Brett’s work nor in my own had we placed our topic in the open and initially, knowing differently was not a concern for either of us. Boredom and frustration eventually moved us in a different direction.

Brett entered his ponch manure inquiry from a position of “not knowing.” His not knowing had several important dimensions to it. He began his inquiry with extremely limited knowledge of his topic. As well, he entered the work not knowing what the “finished product” would be, not knowing what might unfold. It would be easy to leap to the assumption that it was the newness of the topic that served to captivate Brett. I am not sure that it is quite that simple. I recall, many

times in my career, students starting their research from the same position of “not knowing” and they too embraced their new topic for study with excitement and enthusiasm but it was not sustained.

I remember grade two students being asked to chose a country of the world that each would be interested in researching, countries about which they knew very little. These grade two students were keen and interested to learn but, by the end of three weeks, their enthusiasm had dwindled significantly. For many, it took a considerable amount of encouragement and cajoling to finish their projects. Upon completion of their research, their products and knowledge exhibited a strong resemblance to Brett’s wolf research. Newness does not necessarily ensure the sense of wonder that involves losing oneself in the phenomenon, any more than familiarity prevents it from occurring. One simply has to recall the years that Einstein spent enthralled with the notion of relativity, or the years that Wayne Lynch has spent roaming the wilderness to study and photograph bears, to realize that familiarity does not work against preoccupation.

Brett and I entered into our research of wolves and generative curriculum, respectively, with considerable information yet more importantly we carried with us a certain belief about knowing that presupposed a definable knowable topic. Although the students studying the world countries started with little or no information about their particular country, they too came to their work carrying with them the same orientation toward what it means to know.



This orientation is tied to our conventional discourse of schooling and particular assumptions about the notion of objective knowing. Objective knowing has led us to a new level and control of the natural world. The myth of objectivity and mechanization of human experience helps to perpetuate the value of an information down loading approach to schooling (Peterson and Hart, 1997, p.189).

In this orientation, the topic under study can be known by consuming pre-processed information. Hence, all countries studied, like the wolves in Brett's work, became reduced to a series of facts and artifacts. Mexico became warm weather, tacos, the Spanish language and sombreros. China came to be known as chopsticks, New Year celebrations, dragons and samples of unusual script. In this orientation, ingesting a string of nouns, the recognition of specific artifacts stands as knowing. This leaves very little room for sense making, because everything is already determined. This kind of teaching not only renders the countries as predetermined entities but also their inhabitants. It is a dis-acknowledgement of the Mexican and Chinese people as interpretive beings. When curriculum portrays "other" in this manner, it speaks volumes about the dismissive way in which others are treated as object.

### Questioning: The Possibility of Openness

How then can a country study look different from this? The answer to this question is vague yet telling: Vague because the answer is "it depends" and telling because the vagueness says something about generative curriculum.

Generative curriculum is tied to the particular, a particular student, a particular class, a particular teacher and a particular question. How the questions evolve depend on what is happening in that particular classroom.

A few years ago, when I was working with a grade two class a child brought in a newspaper article about a heavy snowfall in Mexico that had left thousands of families in distress. At the time, we were involved in working with several agencies to help needy families in Calgary as part of our year-long study about “What does it mean to live in community?” This little girl saw a connection. Her article broadened the scope of our discussions about community and at the same time drew our attention to Mexico. Mexico wasn’t taken up as a list of generalized concepts, a series of disconnected ideas. It evolved naturally from what this particular class was taking up. The question was rooted, grounded in what was going on in the classroom.

The type of inquiry engaged in by Brett, the grade two students mentioned earlier, as well as me, reflects acts of foreclosure rather than acts of anticipation. “The essence of a question,” says Gadamer (1998) “is to open up the possibilities and keep them open” (p. 299). Questions posed from within a tradition of certainty, that supposes topics can be known precisely, render the likelihood of opening up new possibilities remote. The answers had been determined in advance of the question. Brett and I knew what would be said about our topic from the beginning. The teacher who takes up Mexico as

sombreros and tacos knows before she starts what will be said. The chance of surprise is effectively nullified.

In contrast to the questions Brett asked about wolves, ones that begged precise specific responses, the questions about ponch manure called forth other questions. His inquiry led him to places and people he had not expected. In the course of his inquiry Brett visited a landfill site and a slaughterhouse. He met with and had phone conversations with area residents affected by the ponch manure disposal, Members of Legislative Assembly and aldermen. With each conversation and visit, a variety of complexities and perspectives were brought forth for consideration. Instead of arriving at simple answers as had happened with the wolf study, “There are x number of different types of wolves in Alberta. They eat... their enemies are...”, many of Brett’s questions about ponch manure revealed themselves to be “multi-answerable”. He discovered the answers he received differed depending on who he asked. For example, the residents who had their homes bordering the landfill site had a very different opinion about the disposal of ponch manure than the owner of the slaughterhouse that Brett visited. The definitive answer that marked his previous work was no longer possible. Instead of being a consumer of, and reporter on established information, Brett found himself right in the middle of life’s messy uncertainty. He had to weigh the stories of inconvenience, health concerns, business costs, political indifference, and political platitudes to understand the story of ponch manure. Brett, the fact finder, had to become Brett, the sense-maker. His thinking had to be steered

away from the notion of consumption and reproduction of facts and figures, away from the notion of mastering the topic, to thinking in terms of making sense of and being responsive to the world. The joyless pedestrianism that comes with being positioned as an observer of a world already set and determined was displaced, and Brett's relationship with the world renewed. He had been awakened to a world of possibilities.

As Brett talked with others and visited sites, he became a player in the unfolding story of ponch manure. He was unable to look upon ponch manure with cold-hearted detachment...it became part of him. "Marcel distinguishes between a problem and a mystery"(In Gallagher, 1992, p. 152): an important distinction in the context of Brett's story. A mystery, according to The Oxford Dictionary, is an "inexplicable matter" housed in "secrecy or obscurity". Ponch manure was an obscure issue that Brett had difficulty understanding. As he came across related hidden issues, ponch manure didn't get any easier to explain. A problem, according to Marcel (in Gallagher, 1992), "is something that can be totally objectified and resolved in objective terms because the person confronting the problem can completely detach himself from it and view it externally"(p.152), similar to the way in which Brett approached his wolf topic. Marcel (In Gallagher, 1992, p.152) gives the example of a car breaking down. A mechanic can be hired or the owner can attempt to fix it him/herself.

This is a problem to which there is an objective solution. Things are relatively clear-cut. A mystery on the other hand is different. A mystery is

something that involves the person in such a way that the person cannot step outside of it in order to see it in an objective manner. She is caught within the situation with no possibility of escape, and no possibility of clear-cut solutions. Indeed ambiguity is the rule within a mystery (In Gallagher, 1992, p.152).

As Brett was ensnared more and more by his topic, he discovered that there were no easy answers and he marveled at the complex wonder of it all. His conversations with the various stakeholders—residents, city and government officials, business managers—kept revealing sides of the issue—health, quality of life and cost issues—that left Brett scratching his head.

When Brett's experiences are laid alongside what Gadamer (1998) tells us about play: that it has a similar indeterminate structure to questioning, some light is shed regarding why the two terms, generative curriculum and independent research, are not necessarily synonymous.

Brett's story suggests that self-selected topics do not necessarily ensure interest, generate engagement or new understandings. A teacher's invitation to children to study something that is of particular interest to them is not necessarily generative curriculum. After all, it was Brett himself who chose wolves out of his own personal interest and it was he who sensed that something was missing from his learning.

Choosing a topic for study is a very different thing than posing a genuine question. Wolves was a topic for Brett, not a question. It was a topic that had him searching for facts. Ponch manure was a question that led to more questions and was not foreclosed upon with the discovery of definitive answers. "Learning essentially involves the structure of questioning and if the student has a genuine question the student will be interested and the subject will be relevant"(Gallagher, 1992, p.163). A teacher's invitation to children to study something that is of particular interest to them does not ensure the indeterminacy that sustains interest or generates engagement or new understandings.

Brett's interest in wolves lacked the openness to possibilities that marked his interest in ponch manure. Gadamer (1998) suggests that "deciding the question is the path to knowledge (p. 364)). To ask a question means to bring the topic "into the open". The question must hold some personal relevance to the one who is doing the asking. In other words, the question must be personally relevant. Brett's wolf project was neither very personally relevant or a genuine question. "Only the person who has the question," says Gallagher (1992) "can learn" (p.162), but the real "significance of questioning consists in revealing the questionability of what is questioned ...It has to be brought into a state of indeterminacy," says Gadamer (1998, p. 363). Lack of openness is important to understanding the frequency with which students lose interest in their own topic. It is the primacy of retrieving factual information that shapes most independent research projects, not the search for openings to deepen understanding. The

indeterminacy that is at the heart of playfulness and genuine questioning is often missing in independent research. It certainly was in Brett's wolf study.

### The Presence of Playfulness

Remembering Brett as he took up ponch manure for study brings forth an image of my own two sons, which at first seems misplaced. Central to this memory is a large cardboard box that over the years had masqueraded as a castle, pirate ship, jail, spaceship, hideout, planet... There was magic in that box as it transformed my sons into pirates, medieval knights, Jedi knights... they became totally absorbed in the playfulness of the box. Brett's story resonates with the same playful theme. Brett's story is an invitation to play, to dwell in and open up possibilities. For my boys the play began with the cry "Let's play pirates!" Brett's play began with "Let's find out about ponch manure!" For Brett, like my sons, there was not a means-end framework shaping their work. They did not begin with an eye to produce a predetermined end or in the search of precise answers. What unfolded for Brett, as well as for my boys, was dependent on the responsiveness of the players to what was presented by each of the other players.

As I watched Brett become ensnarled and entangled in the complexity of unraveling the mystery of ponch manure, play, at first, seemed the wrong word to use to describe his efforts. At first, I was concerned that his endeavours might be considered silly or frivolous. But, that certainly was not the case. Brett's work

was difficult work, yet joy and light-heartedness lived alongside as he tried to make sense. Gadamer (1998) points out that “the ease of play---which naturally does not mean that there is any real absence of effort but refers phenomenologically only to the absence of strain—is experienced subjectively as relaxation” (p.105).

I don't think I will forget any time soon the day that Brett returned to the class after his visit to the slaughterhouse to get his ponch manure sample. He could hardly contain himself as he burst through the classroom doors yelling, “I've got it! I've got it!” His voice reflecting equal parts disbelief, reverence and pride. Brett carried his jar of green sludge as though he had the crown jewels in his possession. “I'll take off the lid if you want to smell it,” he said. The look on my face must have answered the question, for the lid stayed on.

While Brett was both buoyed and inspirited in doing his work, he put forth a good deal of effort. The day the alderman phoned our class to speak to Brett about the disposal of ponch manure at the landfill site remains clear in my mind. Certainly, Brett was excited at receiving a phone call from such “an important person”, but his excitement went beyond that. What excited Brett most was that now he had information that didn't quite fit with what he had already discovered. He was already thinking about what he should do next. The conversation with the alderman propelled him forward. His next move turned out to be a call to the minister holding the environment portfolio.



Effort is necessary when what is being studied is devoid of any pure interest (Dewey, 1964). I am interpreting pure interest to mean a genuine preoccupation with the subject matter: a preoccupation that is intrinsic and not necessarily tied to any extrinsic factors. Brett demonstrated this level of preoccupation as he conducted his inquiry. The kind of effort that Brett had to give to his wolf study was significantly different in quality from the effort that was required in taking up ponch manure. In studying wolves Brett's effort and energies were directed toward "sticking with the topic". His interest had waned and it was indeed an effort to complete the work. The effort expended in the second project was tied to making sense out of highly complex, interconnected research data. His engagement in this work exacted high levels of both cognitive and organizational effort. It required effort to arrange the field trips and telephone calls. It required a huge amount of effort to organize his data to present the material to his peers so as not to minimize the complexities of the issues surrounding ponch manure. Yet the "work" itself was effortless. Brett did not speak of his work as work, instead he described it as "fun" and "cool" more like play than work. "The structure of play absorbs the player into itself and thus frees him from the burden of taking the initiative, which constitutes the actual strain of existence" (Gadamer, 1998, p.105). Brett became immersed in the playful to-and-fro movement of the inquiry and allowed himself to be swept along effortlessly on the tide of possibilities.

What is it that imbues curriculum with playfulness? I cast my vision backward and in my mind's eye I can see myself labouring for hours on end to transform the classroom into an enchanted castle, a jungle, a forest... How many hours have I spent preparing food for medieval banquets, Chinese celebrations, and pioneer experiences as a way of ensuring and maintaining student focus and interest? Does this constitute playfulness? Dewey (1966) might raise the notion of externality in response to this question. "When the object or end of educational experience is assumed to be outside self then it has to be made interesting and has to be surrounded with artificial stimuli and with fictitious inducements to attention" (Dewey, 1964, p.127). If I am honest with myself I remember planning with my team partner with an eye to the question, "How do we make this experience really interesting for the students?" Implicit here is the notion that the material under consideration for study is neither meaningful or stimulating enough to hold the students' interest so other activities needed to be arranged to keep them engaged. However, in the case of playfulness Gadamer (1998) reminds us, play is always interesting (p.106). "What holds the player in its spell, draws him into play and keeps him there is the game itself"(Gadamer, 1989, p.106). What kept Brett intrigued was ponch manure itself, no other inducements were needed.

### Wonder: Self-Forgetfulness in Learning

Brett brought a deep sense of wondering to his work. Initially, he was intrigued by how the relative anonymity of ponch manure had all of a sudden taken on a

headline celebrity status and wanted to know “how come?” What was this thing called ponch manure and what was all the fuss about? As he worked to answer these questions new questions arose. It seemed that one question opened on to another, which opened on to another and so on it went. “Wondering is a manner of thinking, pondering and reflecting something,” says Hove (1996, p. 443). The depth of Brett’s wondering both captivated and preoccupied him. It is here the echo of self-forgetting resonates. Brett attended to and listened carefully to the phenomenon, letting himself be directed by it. It was in response to what “came up” in the course of his inquiry that moved his work forward... his door-to-door canvassing of the area residents, the phone conversation with the city alderman...

Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

The relations of the sentient to sensible are compatible with those of the sleeper to his slumber: sleep suddenly comes when a certain voluntary attitude suddenly receives from outside the confirmation for which it was waiting. I am breathing deeply and slowly in order to summon sleep, and suddenly it is as if my mouth were connected to some great lung outside myself which alternately calls forth and forces back my breath. A certain rhythm of respiration, which a moment ago I voluntarily maintained, now becomes my very being, and sleep, until now aimed at. . . , suddenly becomes my situation. In the same way I give ear, or look, in the expectation of a sensation, and suddenly the sensible takes possession of

my ear or my gaze, and I surrender a part of my body, even my whole body, to this manner of vibrating and filling space known as blue or red...

(pp. viii-ix)

I recognize this sense of losing oneself in my own work on a pottery wheel. The materials I work with absorb me: the feel of the cool, smooth, moist mud spinning under my fingers as I struggle to keep it centred. The time passes unnoticed as the glob becomes something or perhaps not. There are times I approach this work without a final shape in mind and simply relish the feel of the cool gritty smoothness beneath my listening hands, telling me about itself. There is a stillness and quiet at times like these as I converse with the mud. When my expectations are suspended things come to me in a way that they do not when I approach the mud as though I knew. There is something important in releasing myself to “it”, in being still and quiet as I allow the sensible to beckon and “think itself within me” (Abram, 1997, p. 55). It is in this move to let the thing speak and to be noticed, be it clay, puddle, generative curriculum or ponch manure that self forgetting takes place and moves us into communion with the phenomenon and toward deeper understanding. Hove writes:

A couple of years ago I was having trouble with depression. One day when I was walking alone in the park, for a brief period all of my interior monologue just stopped... a moment of the most beautiful stillness. All of a sudden I felt close to everything: the park the birds the light the air. I can't think of anything that led up to this experience, but there was such a

wonderful release to it. I suddenly felt like a part of life instead of an observer (1996, p. 442).

In “the face of wonder” (Hove, 1996) it is as though the inner voice that speaks to us so frequently, almost incessantly, is for a while silenced. We, in the presence of wonder, have our cognitive filter shut down for a short time and we are simply allowed to be. Wonder, in making us momentarily forget self, reminds us that we are not the centre of the world but a small part of a much grander scheme. There is something humbling in wonder.

As I try to sort through wondering and self-forgetting I become aware of an interesting paradox, one that suggests that understanding is born not only through self-forgetting but also in self-remembering. Self-remembering is, in part, the invitation rendered by Merleau-Ponty (1962) to recognize that at the heart of even our most abstract cognitions, lies the sensuous and sentient life of the body itself. It is an invitation to remember self as the other part of the reciprocal encounter through which we come to know. A relationship developed between Brett and ponch manure that allowed him to know the world differently, as vibrant and evolving rather than set and static. As the terrain of “inert ideas” (Whitehead, 1963) receded, Brett became fully participant in his knowing.

From within the depths of this encounter we know the thing or phenomenon only as our interlocutor- as a dynamic presence that confronts us and draws us into relation. We conceptually immobilize or objectify the phenomenon only by mentally absenting ourselves from this

relation, by forgetting or repressing our sensuous involvement...By linguistically defining the surrounding world as a determinate set of objects, we cut our conscious, speaking selves off from the spontaneous life of our sensing bodies. (Abram, 1997, p. 56)

Somewhere in this relationship between remembering self as an active participant in an undetermined world, while at the same time losing oneself to the “animateness of things” (Abram, 1997) lies the reciprocity that is required to heighten the possibility of understanding. It was within this continual dance between self-forgetting and self-remembering that Brett rediscovered a world of wonder. His wonderings led him to a place of wonder.

Sometimes wondering bears no conceivable relation to the experience of wonder... Wondering does not always precede and proceed from wonder... But other times their relation can be quite intimate, for wonder may unexpectedly arise out of the process of wondering, and likewise, an extended period of wondering may be stimulated by an initial moment of intense wonder. (Hove, 1996, p. 443)

It was from within the context of his wonderings around ponch manure that Brett found himself struck by wonder. He was returned to the everyday world, the world of our direct spontaneous experiences, and away from the impersonal, objective dimension of glimpsing the world through the secondhand explanation of others.

“In a world without wonder there is nothing to enter relations with; because the world is mute, colourless and inanimate, we lack the means for really living it” (Hove, 1996, p. 441). It was through his relationships, through his openness to his encounters and experiences that Brett was caught up in wonder.

In the moment of wonder things come to life; it may even be that the life they always possess is revealed and appreciated. Wonder places us in contact with an enlarged world of relations and experiences (Hove, 1996, p. 453).

With each encounter he was pulled more firmly into wonder’s grasp. “The call of wonder is in the imperative “Look!” (Hove, 1996, p. 453). Brett’s wondering propelled him into remembering the world as “the child who went forth every day.” He was claimed by his topic and lost to it.

A legitimate question to raise is whether the topic of ponch manure is actually worth being “lost to”. It never really entered my mind to be skeptical of ponch manure’s worth. From the start, ponch manure was more to Brett than a concept. It was a story he wanted to tell. It never was what Whitehead (1963) calls an “inert idea ...ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, or tested, or thrown into fresh combinations”(p. 13). As Brett actively worked with the information, ponch manure became part of much larger questions, “What does it mean to live well together?” and “What does it mean to be part of a community?” In pursuing this inquiry the amount of “collateral learning ”(Dewey, 1963, p.48) that occurred was impressive. Dewey (1963) uses the term

“collateral learning” to describe additional unanticipated learning that takes place while in the course of learning something. Brett’s ponch manure experience was rich in collateral learning. He gained an understanding of interviewing skills, data management, municipal politics, provincial politics, overhead cost and so forth... Collateral learning comes about through genuine involvement in actively participated in sense-making. This collateral or “generative learning’ is an important aspect of generative curriculum.

### Re-Tracing

Brett’s story shows how “wonder”, “question” and “play” enjoy an intimate kinship with “indeterminacy”, and singly as well as together, have something to say about generative curriculum and generative knowing. Engagement and participation, in a yet to be decided upon world, demands a curriculum in which the learner is given opportunity to both forget and remember self as a way of coming to know. Woven through the fabric of Brett’s story “is a world of possibilities that begs for a curriculum that brings out the undetermined possibilities of the player and the undetermined meanings of the world” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 162). It is a story that sheds light on two different faces of knowing: Objective knowing, tied to the foreclosing tendency of conceptual determinism, and generative knowing, tied to transformation through “undetermined possibilities”. It is through undetermined possibilities that the likelihood of understanding is increased.



How undetermined possibilities appear and what they reveal is part of their intrigue and mystery. For they come in different shapes and sizes. What constitutes an undetermined possibility for one learner might not for another. For Brett undetermined possibilities came as a result of the unfamiliar but for Kyle they arrived through a different portal. It is to Kyle's story that I now turn my attention.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RE-VIEWING THE FAMILIAR

*Two roads diverged in a wood and I  
I took the one less traveled by  
And that has made all the difference*

(Robert Frost, 1969, p. 105)

*“Why do circles have 360 degrees, Mrs. Demcoe?” asks Kyle. I am caught off guard.*

*“That’s a good question Kyle. I’m not sure of the answer.” I ask the rest of the class, “Does anyone have any idea?”*

*Kyle’s question had evolved from a rather innocuous one of my own, asked during a motion geometry lesson. “How many times do you think this piece of paper can move from the centre of the circle to the circumference?” In my right hand I held a small rectangular piece of paper and in my lap a large cardboard circle perched. It was neither a particularly exciting nor intriguing question. And to be honest I had not even anticipated asking it. Furthermore, I really had given no thought to what the answer might be. It was simply something that emerged in the conversation we were having.*

*“I think it is 360,” answered Kyle. “Although I am not sure why. I think that number has something to do with a circle.”*

*"You're right, Kyle," I say. "360 is an important number for circles. 360 is how many degrees a circle has," I answered confidently. As I said these words my brain was simultaneously wondering if the piece of paper could be moved in more than 360 ways. What about the spaces in between? What about the spaces between each degree of a circle? Is there not room to move the paper there? My thoughts were interrupted by the puzzled look on Kyle's face. He asked seriously, "Why do they?"*

*"Why do they what? I am not sure what you are asking, Kyle," I said, most likely with perplexity written all over my own face.*

*"Why do they have 360?"*

*In the following few minutes a discussion broke out about why 360? "Does it have something to do with the multiple factors of 360?" one student asks.*

*"Maybe there is no really good reason," suggests another. "Maybe someone just decided that's the way it will be!"*

*Finally the suggestion was made that we needed help to answer this question. I suggested that perhaps Dr. Davidson from the University of Calgary might be a good resource. Kyle and Andrea went to the library to use the speakerphone to contact Dr. Davidson. When they came back they announced that he was coming to our classroom to help us with our question about circles.*

I have carried this piece of knowledge about circles with me since I too was Kyle's age, yet have never even given it one moment's consideration. Why indeed do circles have 360 degrees? For that matter what does degree mean?

For decades I have proceeded confidently knowing I know circles. Just think about all that I know:  $\pi r^2$  is the area of a circle;  $2\pi r$  is the circumference; if you rotate a circle on a chord through the center, through the third dimension, you get a sphere; the area to perimeter ratio is largest for a circle than for any other two dimensional shape ... yet Kyle showed me that I did not know circles as well I thought I did. With one small, simple question Kyle had rendered the circle unfamiliar to me. He had managed to imbue it with a sense of intrigue, a sense of wonder. Kyle's question acted to disrupt the familiar and with it brought me face to face with a way of knowing and being that has a bearing on teaching and learning. The circle question turns out to be a much bigger question than it first appears. Although asked within the classroom setting, in trying to make sense of it, I turn to experiences beyond the classroom walls.

### The Familiar Terrain

Quite recently, I was walking along a path beside the creek near our cabin, a path I have walked many times, and if asked, one I would say I know very well. This particular day as I made my way along I noticed a small trail leading away from the creek, taking those who traveled it, up the mountainside. Although it was a small trail, it was very noticeable, at least this day it was. As I stood at the juncture of the two paths, the words of Frost's poem came to mind. If I had taken the literal meaning to heart, I suppose I should have embarked down its less trodden surface. Yet I didn't. Instead I stood there and marveled at the fact that until now this very obvious mountain route had remained hidden to me. What

had drawn my attention to it? Was it the sunlit juniper berries? Was it the creaking pines sawing back and forth in the wind that alerted me to its presence? I do not know. I do know that the path's familiarity of moments ago had been rendered less so. As I walked backed to the cabin, I was caught up wondering what else had my eyes failed to see along that route. Had my own familiarity with it prevented me in some way from seeing beyond what I already knew to be there? Could familiarity be some form of specialized blindness, a blindness caused not from some physical or biological basis but from intimate acquaintance with a person, place or thing? Does familiarity hide from view possibilities and openings because we are preconditioned to see that which is expected?

I remember my mother talking about living through the air raids in Britain during World War II. To this day, more than 50 years later, she remembers in detail the routines and expectations... the same actions over and over ...the same terror over and over. My father-in-law, also, has wartime memories. He had the grave misfortune of spending his 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in a German prisoner-of-war camp. He rarely talks of his time there yet, when he does, he describes the day-in-day-out sameness as "the hardest part". It is an interesting paradox that the unchanging dailyness that was so difficult for my father-in-law to accept, is the very same quality my mother credits with having had a calming effect on those living through the bombings. I remember her saying, "Even when the wailing woke us from our sleep and the droning sound of the enemy aircraft could

be heard overhead, there was comfort somehow, in knowing what to do and what to expect. I suppose it gave us the illusion of having some control.”

Familiarity it seems is not a straightforward concept. It has something to do with sameness, a sameness that provokes different responses and feelings and possibly satisfies different needs. As a teacher, the unchanging daily-ness of which my father-in-law speaks is an interesting notion. Although classroom life is dynamic and exciting, there certainly is a daily-ness to it...same bell schedules, same faces, same daily gym time, same program of studies. Sameness has a very real presence. So is this familiar daily-ness a good thing, a bad thing, neither one nor the other, or perhaps both? Does familiarity provoke a form of blindness, produce a calming effect, manifest itself as boredom, emanate from a need to control, all of the above, none of the above or something else? What role does familiarity play in generative curriculum?

My initial response to this would be, of course, familiarity is a good and necessary thing. Consider how important it is that a teacher be familiar with her students, their interests, aptitudes and family background. How else can a teacher individualize programs to meet the specific needs of students without a sound familiarity of their learning profile? Given these litigious times, think of the difficulties a teacher would encounter if she were not familiar with the mandated curriculum. How many times have I confidently asserted, in conversations and discussions about generative curriculum, that generative curriculum is not a departure from the mandated program of studies but instead it is borne out of a

deep familiarity with it? All of a sudden I'm not quite so sure. Familiarity has, I suspect, a complicated and important presence in generative curriculum.

I remember a while back a principal telling me that he had been on a visit to another school and was astounded by the cluttered appearance of their staffroom. Above the kitchen cupboards there were stacked all sorts of unattractive boxes, old appliances, plastic bowls, etc. That day when he returned to his own school he was horrified to discover the same unattractive array of "stuff" stashed in his own staffroom. A high-ranking official in the US army once commented, "You can park a tank in the middle of grocery store parking lot. Initially it causes quite a stir. After a couple of days it simply becomes another vehicle."

Heidegger (1962) says that which we deal with regularly eludes our notice. Its familiar ordinariness renders it transparent. It would be difficult indeed to get through the course of living if the automatic responses that come from familiarity were not available to us. Yet alongside the security that comes from a sense of familiarity lives the other side of its personality ...familiarity's ability to conceal so that we become inured to what is around us, the piles of junk in the staffroom, the tank in the parking lot, the 360 degrees of a circle.

Jackson (1968) writes:

When we are asked about our trip downtown or our day at the office we rarely bother describing the ride on the bus or the time spent in front of the watercooler. Indeed, we are more likely to report that nothing happened than to catalogue the pedestrian actions that took place between home and return. Unless something interesting occurred there is little purpose in talking about our experience.

Yet from the standpoint of giving shape and meaning to our lives these events about which we rarely speak may be as important as those that hold our listener's attention. Certainly they represent a much larger portion of our experience than do those about which we talk. The daily routine, the "rat race" and the infamous "old grind" may be brightened from time to time by happenings that add color to an otherwise drab existence, but the greyness of our daily lives has an abrasive potency of its own (p. 4).

It is only when something happens to draw our attention to the familiar that we are reminded of its presence.

To teach means to show something. Kyle's question teaches for it reveals a particular type of teaching that does not show anything. It casts light on a particular type of pedagogy that might best be described as "not teaching", for to answer Kyle's question, by pointing to convention, is an act of foreclosure. It terminates the conversation and initiates Kyle into the familiar monochromatic greyness of a particular conception of curriculum enactment. What more can be



said after the teacher has declared “it” to be a done deal. To give the answer “that’s just the way it is”, or to imply “no more need be said”, belongs to a tradition shrouded in forgetfulness.

Human existence says Heidegger, falls prey to the tradition of which it has more or less explicitly taken hold. This tradition keeps it from providing its own guidance, whether in inquiring or in choosing...When tradition thus becomes master, it does so in such a way that what it transmits is made so inaccessible...that it rather becomes concealed. Tradition blocks our access to those primordial sources from which the categories and concepts handed down to us have been in part genuinely drawn. Indeed it makes us forget that they have had such an origin. (Gallagher 1992, p. 85)

The response, given by Dr. Davidson to Kyle’s question, played a significant role in directing the work of our class. His response returned us to a different place, to a different time. We were all captivated by the story of the circle. It was a tale of Byzantium, of the moon and the stars, of culture and science, and of perfection. Circle was no longer a lifeless disconnected concept but instead steeped in relationships. Circle enjoys a rich and colourful past. Its history intrigued the class. One of the threads picked up by the students was the notion of perfection and what that looks like in today’s North American society. Browsing through popular magazines and watching commercials provided them with clues as to what “perfect” looks like. Perfect as presented in the media, at least to the eyes of these grade four students, seemed to be in their early twenties, fit, lovers of the outdoors, sports cars and sports utility vehicles, and recreation.

Janine, one of the students, made an interesting observation about how often sports and sports stars were associated with this image of perfection. Cultural values and definition of success became part of the discussion. At first it seems unlikely that a significant portion of the grade three programs of studies could possibly be covered from a discussion on circles, but it was. What constitutes “the good life”, what is valued and desired, is very relevant to Alberta’s past, present and future, and its special communities.

Kyle’s question is important because it reveals the power of disruption to imbue curriculum with a “spirit of generosity”. His question serves as a reminder that the world is a place of “interweaving texts and textures of human life in which we are all embedded” (Jardine, 1992, p.51). Kyle’s question is an invitation to take things up differently, to sever them from their shackles of familiarity. Kyle’s story reminds us that things, the world, can be otherwise. At one time a certain soft drink manufacturer used the phrase, “the pause that refreshes” in their advertising campaign. Kyle’s question is that kind of pause for it replaces the “lethargy” of the familiar with an “energy” of its own possibilities.

The disruption to my normal way of being revealed a propensity toward herding my students into the same tradition, one that equates asseverated facts as the way to know, without considering what they mean or where they come from. When there is no challenge to tradition the familiar simply gets recycled. My familiar is passed on to become someone else’s familiar. When familiarity is

challenged the door of learning is flung wide open—standing at the open portal one is provided a chance to view the world differently.

### The Productive Nature of Disruption

Learning and teaching take place within many horizons. One such horizon is the interplay that happens between that which is familiar and that which is not.

“Unfamiliarity, notes Husserl, is at the same time a mode of familiarity. We already actively understand the world even before we attempt to grasp anything in a thematic or cognitive fashion” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 60). Similarly, Heidegger (1962) says we bring to the process of understanding, preconceptions that make new understanding possible. These advance structures Heidegger (1962) calls “fore-havings”.

Thus unfamiliarity is only relatively so. Gadamer (1998) adds that it is from within tradition, from within the context of the familiar that we move toward an understanding of the unfamiliar. Sometimes it is the case that tradition dominates the educational process, a situation that almost happened had Kyle’s question not intruded. In their concealed and transparent state, traditions end up shaping and deciding curricular matters. We cannot step outside ourselves in an attempt to understand. Learning takes place within tradition. Gallagher (1992) comments that the educational process and tradition:

. . . is a place of interchange, trade, a competitive market which depends both on the capital of tradition, fore-structure, and historical effects, and

the risk factors attached to the innovative interpretations that are produced. The exchange of ideas which takes place in this learning process is not a simple bartering of ready-made commodities. It involves transformations of perspectives, the opening of horizons, the expansion of meaningful worlds. (Gallagher, 1992, p.139)

Disruption, going against the grain, upsetting the apple cart is never an easy position to occupy. The process is neither smooth nor comfortable because the unfamiliar is not immediately overcome by familiarity: it does not spontaneously fit into the context set up by the fore-structure of understanding, but provides some resistance to understanding (Gallagher, 1992, pp. 139-144). Becker and Dorfler (1989) maintain order is much easier to use and understand. It was in the context of assigning a research project to our grade three and four students, one that invited students to play an active role in the construction of their understandings, that my partner and I discovered how uncomfortable moving away from the familiar can be.

Shortly after sending a letter home with the students describing the upcoming research project I received a note from one of my student's mother. Cole's mom, Valerie, wrote to express her frustrations with her inability to find any information in the library about her son's research project. She wrote that Cole had been reduced to tears and she herself was fast approaching the same point because of their unsuccessful foray to the library. Valerie was the first of many parents to

register their concern over our research project. Although it happened almost four years ago, it remains as vivid as though it happened yesterday. Naively, I thought the success that was the eventual outcome of this grade three/four project had erased the frustrations of its beginnings. The congratulatory smiles and pats on the back from the parents as they watched their children captivate the audience while presenting their work brought with it a sense of victory and vindication. A sense of “I told you so”, coupled with allowing myself to be seduced by the accolades of my initial detractors, prevented me from ever taking a close look at the difficulties of those first weeks of the research project. The morning after the note went home was like fending off a gale force assault of parental concern. It has taken until now to understand their angst, an angst that was a result of a disruption that challenged the traditions that constituted their familiar understanding of what teaching and learning meant.

From the concerns and angst in the note it is clear that both Cole and his mom carried with them their own understanding about learning and teaching: one that is based on the assumption that learning is seeking out, acquiring information from authoritative texts. When they could not find a book on the topic, frustration set in, and the project was declared to be too difficult. It is not surprising that nothing had been published on Cole’s topic, given how current an issue he was investigating, namely the effectiveness of the grizzly overpasses spanning Highway 1 west of Banff. It is interesting that all the conversations I had with parents that morning were variations on the theme, “This is too difficult”. The

perception existed that educational endeavours should not be taxing and what was being asked of these students was simply too hard.

When I asked Cole if there were other possible resources he could think to access, he suggested the zoo and the University of Calgary. It turned out that Cole was invited to the home of Dr. Ian Ferguson, a professor at the University of Calgary, to have a conversation about grizzlies. Cole video-taped the conversation and included it as part of his presentation. When Cole told his mother about the course he was going to follow her response was "I didn't think that would be legitimate." "What," I asked, "is illegitimate about having a conversation with a man who has spent his life studying grizzlies?" "I thought it had to be a written report," she answered. It would suggest legitimate is that which fits with a particular fore-having, prejudice and tradition. When a disruption challenges the familiar, existing preconceptions are called into question.

Dewey (1964) contends that prejudiced vision prevents us from seeing the familiar. Prejudice in this case is not used in the vernacular but instead to indicate the preconceptions and fore-structure of understanding that each of us brings to any given situation. When the familiar is cast as the unfamiliar our eyes are opened to our prejudices and learning occurs. "A teacher's task is not simply to provide opinions, or insert information but working within traditional frameworks to open up opportunities for such encounters, to help create the occasion in which the student will come to challenge in relation to a particular

tradition” (Gallagher, 1992, p.143). An important dimension of generative learning experiences is looking for and creating opportunities to challenge with respect to particular traditions. When hidden portals are revealed, when the familiar is rendered unfamiliar then a place for undetermined possibilities is made. And it is not always a particularly comfortable spot to occupy.

I remember showing a film to the class about the hardships faced by the pioneers who opened up the prairie provinces. One of the comments made was about the frequent rate of death of mothers during childbirth. One little girl asked, “Why didn’t they just stop having babies?” I recall feeling a momentary rush of panic upon hearing this question. Grade three is not the level at which sex education is taught. Thankfully, a response came to me that answered the question but steered us in another direction. I talked briefly about the economic need for large families in order to cultivate the untamed land. This, however, did not satisfy the girl. She asked, “What if the woman only wanted a small family or got sick when she had babies so she didn’t want any more?” This turned out to be a question that preoccupied a large number of the students. It carried them into a study on the rights of women and to the work of Emily Murphy and her colleagues.

Another time, we as a class, were talking about an opportunity of going to Zoo School that had presented itself when a boy commented, “I don’t think we should go. Zoos are animal prisons. Or years ago, when my class won tickets to the Moscow Circus and one of my students passionately announced that circuses

were “torture chambers for animals”. Disruptions are uncomfortable and sometimes annoying. At times, ignoring them seems like a good idea. Yet often, taking up these particular instances has “a generative and enlivening effect” (Jardine, 1992, p. 51) on curriculum for who knows what possibilities might be revealed through this unanticipated opening.

### Re-Calling Curriculum as an Open System

Leaning heavily on the models of science, certainty and predictability have become familiar curriculum fare. Suggesting disruption as being productive to learning and curriculum at first seems misplaced. However as Becker and Dorfner write,

More and more scientists are coming to the conclusion that chaos is the normal course of events. The much prized and well-understood order of things is just a special case. The exceptional circumstance has been the center of scientific interest for centuries because it is easier to understand and use. In combination with the successes of modern science over the past 200 years it has lead to a disastrous misconception: that everything is computable (In MacPherson, 1995, p. 264)

Even in the face of scientific thinking showing the contrary, the familiar legacy of stability and predictability, clarity and control, enjoy a healthy presence in curriculum. Brett’s attempt to know wolves, is a prime example of curriculum devolved from certainty. As is teaching countries by way of noun association ...Mexico is sombreros, tacos and piñatas...or as Ladson-Billings (1994)



describes this type of curriculum, the “foods and festival approach” to learning (p.151). The Tyler (1949) curriculum model of preset ends, objectives developed in line with those ends, success measured in terms of objectives met are instances of curriculum built upon the illusion of predictability. According to Doll (1989), this is a system view of curriculum but not a living, open system view (p. 246). Alternatively, open systems differ from the system view as they feed on flux, using flux as the substance for their continual becoming:

The open systems feed on the flux of matter and energy coming to them from the outside world. Biological cells die when cut off from their environment...they cannot be separated from the fluxes that they incessantly transform. The contrast here is between (a) a highly controlled system where external parameters shape interactions toward a pre-set end of efficiency and (b) a fluctuating system where external perturbations provide the system with the very means for internal transformation. (Doll, 1989, p. 246)

In contrast, the familiar closed system of curriculum would be one that seals itself off from “the fluxes that compose nature”(Doll, 1989, p. 246). It keeps the world at a distance to keep life’s rough edges from getting in the way of achieving the desired outcomes. “It is in response to the beliefs that such a position rest upon that prompted Kuhn to call for a paradigm shift away from these deep seated metaphors that drive the whole enterprise” (MacPherson, 1995, p. 269). In terms

of curriculum, this paradigm shift is an invitation to forget the pretense of predictability and to take the world up by considering the unfamiliar.

Doll (1989) claims that open systems of curriculum allow disruption to have a place. “An open system needs fluxes perturbations, anomalies, errors: these are the triggers which set of reorganization”, (Doll, 1989, p. 246). Gadamer’s (1998) voice, speaking on the nature of educational experience, can also be heard here, for he asserts that it is in the midst of these fluxes, perturbations, anomalies and errors that the chance of transformation occurs. We have discussed how disruptions to familiar notions of what it means to do research, what it means to be an expert, what it means to know, and in working through these challenges to the familiar how change is fostered. It is in working through the disruptions of the familiar that transformation occurs. It would be naïve and misleading to assert that all disruptions are productive; some are purely disruptive. For example, the time a father of one of my students drove his new welding truck into the school field, rushed into the classroom and bellowed “Come on out and have a look at my new truck. It’s a beaut!”

The importance of productive disruptions to curriculum is that they cast the familiar into something alien. In its unfamiliar appearance “it” beckons a closer look. Upon closer inspection those things unconsidered before, unnoticed before, unrevealed before begin to question the taken for granted nature of the familiar.

When disruptions occur in curriculum it too becomes transformation. Learning becomes “vital”. It becomes generative.

### Re-Tracing

Familiarity, as a form of color-blindness, views curriculum as humdrum grey. By disrupting the familiar, as the greyness dissipate colour once again is revealed. However, to lift the greyness, teaching and learning has to be more than going beyond the familiar. “It means risking the familiar ground to allow the unfamiliar to find a place” (Gallagher, 1992, p.139). Over-emphasis on method and transmission ignores the fertile generative ground that exists in the space between the familiar and the unfamiliar. “Familiarity, say the philosophers, is often the most unfamiliar or as Rousseau puts it “experience of the strange leads us to examine the familiar” (Gallagher, 1992, p. 124). Hove (1996) reminds us that within the experiences of the familiar routines of our daily existence there lurks the potential of wonder in our daily living: the possibility “to look with new eyes upon, or see the wonder in, the ordinary” (p. 444). It is in this space of disrupted familiarity that preconceptions, traditions and biases are transformed and generativity flourishes. How does this space for disruption get created? How does disruption get welcomed onto the curricular landscape? I return, once again to practice, in an attempt to unravel the knottedness of disruption and undetermined possibilities, and how their residency comes to be in curriculum.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RE-ROUTING CHANCE AND DIRECTION

*We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time*

(Eliot, (1978), p.232)

*Stephanie wrote, "I don't ever want to meet an Indian. I don't want to be scalped or have my house burnt down. James wrote, "Indians are savages. I don't want to know them."*

These writing samples belong to a story of practice that happened several years ago, while teaching a grade three/four class. My teaching partner and I began the year by looking at the meaning of the term "Indian". We wanted our students to think deeply about what that particular word meant. It was actually part of a larger idea we wanted to explore with our students about how the past informs the present and the future. We arranged for videos on many different native cultures to come into the classroom, brought in hundreds of information books, as well as legends, pieces of native artwork decorated our walls. At the same time we were reading the Betsy Byars novel Trouble River to the class. This novel had been deliberately chosen because of the stereotypic way the author

portrayed Indians. We anticipated that as the students became acquainted with the diversity of culture, subsumed in the word “Indian”, they would begin to question Betsy Byars’ portrayal.

It was with the arrival of an unanticipated interruption onto the curriculum landscape that Trouble River became a highly generative undertaking. It was when we asked the children to respond, in writing, to the question, “After listening to the novel Trouble River what do you think of Indians?” The responses shocked us and disrupted our intended plans. The responses were all variations of the same theme: Indians were dangerous, terrifying and were people to be feared.

It was the intensity and prevalence of the responses that fascinated and dismayed us. Instead of questioning Betsy Byars’ portrayal, they had been convinced by her words. The very tradition we had been trying to challenge had intensified. The entire class had arrived at the same conclusion, not the one for which we had planned! We knew we could not sweep what had happened under the carpet. We had to do something.

In the following months our work together centred around the question, “Why does Byars present Indians in this manner?” In the course of engaging in this inquiry, we were propelled into conversations that neither my teaching partner nor I ever anticipated having. We were taken places on this journey that appeared nowhere in our initial plans. The initial web we had created to show

the ideas and concepts to be taught, as well as the activities, books and films that would allow us to do this work, differed greatly from the lived experience of studying Trouble River. Given this, it would be reasonable to assume that since the plan, the web, had little to do with the eventual generative nature of Trouble River, it was unimportant to what occurred. Yet to make that claim is to forget that without it the entire experience would not have happened.

The intent of studying Trouble River was to question a particular understanding of “Indian”. The novel, placed against the richness of native culture presented in other sources, was the vehicle through which we intended to accomplish this. It is only now that I realize the huge assumption I made. I assumed that my students would come to the conclusion that Betsy Byars’ portrayal was rife with prejudice. I entered the work carrying this belief and thought all students would also arrive, through planned activities, at this same destination point. What has been shown is an example of a particular kind of practice, the outcomes approach to teaching and learning. The nature of the topic has perhaps deluded me into thinking that this was generative work. However, as Brett’s story revealed it is the relationship the learner has to the topic, and the way it is taken up, that are important to generativity, not simply the topic itself. At the outset the Trouble River image of practice is simply another story of teaching as transmission and to be honest, this realization comes as quite a shock.

### Re Considering the Plan

At the outset, clearly it is I, along with my partner, who set the course. We examined the curriculum and satisfied ourselves that we could, by taking up “Indian”, address the grade three and four mandated program. Considerable time was spent webbing the mandated curriculum to the term “Indian” as well as in webbing activities that we felt would allow us “to cover the Program of Studies”. We chose the novel. We brought in the selected resources. In my mind’s eye, I can see and hear myself in conversation with colleagues, saying generative curriculum is about making connections and then together making a web, depicting all the curricular connections we could think of, centred around one main topic. Yet much of Trouble River grew out of the unexpected. A nagging doubt plagues me about the place of webbing and planning in generative curriculum.

An image of myself at 18 on a European coach holiday, comes to mind: A holiday that was planned to the nth degree. Months before the actual holiday, I knew exactly what I would be doing on any given day. I knew the hotels, restaurants, even the sights that would be visited on each day of the holiday. Ten years later, I went back to Europe, again the trip was planned. The rental car was arranged. We knew the cities we wanted to see and booked hotels for certain nights, but beyond that our days were not determined. Two things remain vivid in my memory about that first trip. After about five days I remember resenting having almost all my time accounted for. The second memory is the

day I separated myself from the group. As usual, our time in the Louvre, had been structured for us. A tour was planned so that we could see the highlights. We only had two hours and the tour company wanted us to see the “best things”. It was when we were part way through our tour that I noticed a poster, advertising a Michaelangelo exhibit, on loan from a museum in Florence. I have always been fascinated by the work of Michaelangelo so this was too good an opportunity to forego. I talked my girlfriend into coming with me and off we went. The next hour was the highlight of the entire trip. On display were ink drawings, canvasses, and letters done over decades of the artist’s life. I was so enthralled, wondering about the people in the paintings, who they were, why had they been painted, on whose walls had these paintings hung that we nearly missed our bus. There were far more instances like this on my second trip, captivating, intriguing experiences that were stumbled upon.

I suppose there is an element of comfort and safety in getting what you expect. My first trip was a graduation present from my parents. They had chosen a coach trip deliberately because of the high level of safety involved. When the journey became less structured, as was the case on my second trip to Europe, the opportunity for adventure, borne out of a sense of not knowing what might transpire, was much higher. This uncertainty necessitated an alertness to the world around us. We were called upon to attend to our surroundings in order to make decisions about where and how and when.



Consider says Abrams (1997):

a spider weaving its web, for instance, and the assumption still held by many scientists that the behaviour of such a diminutive creature is thoroughly “programmed in its genes”. Certainly the spider has received a rich genetic inheritance from its parents and its predecessors. Whatever “instructions,” however, are enfolded within the living genome, they can hardly predict the specifics of the microterrain within which the spider may find itself at any particular moment. They could hardly have determined in advance the exact distances between the cave wall and the branch that the spider is now employing as an anchorage point for her current web, or the exact strength of the monsoon rains that make web—spinning a bit more difficult on this evening. And so the genome could not explicitly have commanded the order of every flexion and extension of her various limbs as she weaves this web into place. However complex are the inherited programs, patterns or predispositions, they must still be adapted to the immediate situation which the spider finds itself. However determinate one’s genetic inheritance, it must still, as it were, be woven into the present, an activity that necessarily involves both a receptivity to the specific shapes and textures of the present, and a spontaneous creativity in adjusting oneself (and one’s inheritance) to those contours (p. 50).

Davis, Sumara and Kieren (1996) remind us “the phenomenon of learning must embrace the dynamic and complex interplay of individual and environment” (p.

155). There is something about the uncertainty in our environment that tends to heighten our sense of what is happening around us. In its absence a mind-numbing quality descends and envelops. When one is told what to do, what to think, what to look for, what is important and why, there is very little need to pay attention beyond the confines of the structure of expectations. Once one moves beyond seeking certainty, says Doll (1993) "it is possible to see indeterminacy as that which encourages, indeed entices us to participate in the generation of meaning. The openness of indeterminacy invites us into dialogue with the situation at hand, to communicate with it and with each other" (p. 283).

In removing the chance of surprise, there exists the chance of shutting out other possibilities. As we waited passively to be told what to attend to next in the sheltered safety of controlled experience of the coach trip, the vitality that was Europe was kept from us. By ensuring safety through precision planning the experience of Europe became the bus company's conceptualization of it. This experience of knowing has something important to say about curriculum. As Davis, Sumara and Kieren (1996) point out "the school curriculum cannot exist apart from the world. It cannot be thought of as something intended to reflect or reveal the universe, for it is an inextricable part of the universe" (p.163). By separating the learning from the world distortion happens. Curriculum becomes a distant view of the world through a particular lens. We lived the tour company's idea of Europe, not Europe itself. The bus tour removed and protected us from much that was Europe.

I can see myself at times in the classroom over the years working hard to keep life at bay so it would not have the chance to interrupt, to interfere with the concepts to be covered on the plan. If safety is tied to precision planning, so too I think is convenience, a convenience that allows the teacher's "agenda" to be carried out. At the heart of it though, I suspect lies the need for "control". At the beginning of Trouble River the teachers were very much in charge of the reins. In contrast to the first trip, convenience and safety did not figure as prominently in the plans of my second. As we muddled and negotiated our way around, we were as the saying goes "right in the thick of things". Ultimately it allowed us a chance to know Europe differently, as a living entity rather than as a series of disconnected sight-seeing spots.

### Teaching in the Thick of Things

There are many similarities between Trouble River and that second European trip. The richness, the uncertainty, the vitality of experience that was Europe was also Trouble River: Images of me contending with, rejoicing in, saddened by, lost in, confused by, angry at, disappointed with as I lived Europe, as I lived Trouble River flood back. Dealing with the complexities, the emotions, the surprises that rise in the course of living, constitutes what it is to be in the thick of things. I am reminded of those early explorers who set their courses long before the invention of longitude and never quite knew where they were. "They looked to the stars and knew they were missing information, terra nullius raising the hair on their necks"(Michaels, 1998, p.19). I think about those early mariners and see myself.

Embarking down Trouble River was done with no small amount of trepidation. I need to qualify that last statement, for initially, with plan at the ready, I felt no fear or concern nor did I anticipate any. I entered, very comfortably in control, with the tradition of certainty operative, silently ensuring me that the term “Indian” would unfold according to plan. It was only when the real disruption occurred that trepidation entered the scene. It was only when we were seriously blown off course that I was able to relate to those ancient mariners; entering uncharted waters, not knowing what lay ahead, at the mercy of forces beyond our control. As navigators of curriculum, teachers are positioned differently. It requires moving away from the notion of teachers as holders of and passers on of knowledge that we find in Tyler’s conception of teacher and curriculum. Instead:

... the teacher participates with the student in the bringing forth of a world of understanding. While the teacher and the students have different histories, and hence bring forth and reflect the world differently, ...the teacher and the students are working on a common project- the simultaneous bringing forth of themselves and the world- even if their respective interpretations of their actions and experiences differ (Davis, Sumara and Kieren, 1996, p. 157).

Upon the arrival of the disruption, Trouble River was taken up with the students in much the same way I traveled Europe the second time. “Chance and purpose became codeterminers” (Doll, 1993, p. 284) of what transpired.

I recall inviting a member of the Tsuu T'ina Nation into our classroom. We had invited him in response to the piece of writing that the students had done after listening to the Betsy Byars' novel Trouble River. As mentioned, Betsy Byars' portrayal of "Indian" had left the students with the impression that "all Indians are marauding savages who kill white people and burn their houses." Our guest was the son of a chief and spoke passionately about his heritage, showed artifacts and told stories of his people. Our intent, of course, was to allow the children an opportunity to talk to a person of the First Nation—and to challenge Betsy Byars' portrayal of members of this culture. During the presentation a grade three student asked him, "Is the word Indian insulting to you?" While responding to this question he remarked, "Your culture has not treated my people well." He went on to talk passionately about residential schools, the reservation system and the loss of culture. Another teacher watching the presentation was very upset by his remarks. "He had no right to bring that up and to say these things," she said. Another reminder of how uncomfortable disruptions can be.

Several days later during another conversation, Anna, one of our grade three students, shared her thoughts with us. Anna said, "I've been thinking about what the native presenter told us. Don't you think the Indian people know a different story of history than the one we read in our history books?" As she spoke there was concern in her voice... She appeared confused by what she had uncovered. "How can it be," she asked, "that history, fact, can be more than one thing?" In much the same manner that the sandbar or an unanticipated sail on the horizon

called upon the mariner to respond in some way, so too did Anna's question make the same demand on me to respond. Her question took us on an unanticipated course that had everything to do with our inquiry into "Indian" but had not been planned. "Being on the lookout" is as much a part of generative curriculum as it was for those earlier sailors as they carried out their work. It is in the careful watching of, listening to and responding to students as they make connections arising out of their questions that both direction and chance are built into the curriculum. Within this space, between chance and direction, curriculum reveals itself as being full of possibilities, possibilities that often extend well beyond the intended connections on the plan.

Making connections seems to happen when something catches our gaze and demands us to receive it, entertain it, consider it. What it is that captures us, when it occurs, and for whom and why, is constituted and reconstituted through living a life. For Anna, it was the notion of story that intrigued her and why one gets privileged over another. For Kyle, his thoughts became preoccupied with degrees in a circle and for Brett it was ponch manure that captivated his attention. Following and covering the map precisely, diverts attention from the chance openings and possibilities that reside elsewhere . . . off the beaten path.

### The Danger of Curriculum as Map

The planning that goes into generative curriculum is important. It sets a direction, a course, an intent. After all, teachers must start from somewhere.

Mapping out the curriculum on a web is one such starting point. Yet it is the paths that get followed, the routes that get taken from then on, that become more important. Jagodinzki also sees curricular outlines as starting points but cautions that “when they are plotted with precision they run the risk of becoming programs of repression” (Pinar and Reynolds, 1992, p.162). Maps, he says:

... allow the surveillance of the land from a safe distance. To see the lay of the land eases the students’ anxiety. They show the student where they have been, where they are going and how they may get there. Maps freeze time and must be activated by the journey of learning experiences(Pinar and Reynolds, 1992, p.162).

These words echo the voice of John Dewey as he draws attention to “the difference between the student as a spectator to others’ knowledge or as a personal creator of meaning”(Doll, 1992, p. 284). Curriculum, as map, shows the lay of the land without ever having to walk it. The learner is introduced to the landscape but the sweat and effort of negotiating the topography is eliminated. Curriculum, as map, may very well be the first generation “virtual learning situation”! But when the routes, demarcated on the map as static lines, are constituted as “lifelines”, susceptible to the uncertain caprices involved in living, curriculum falls prey to an element of chance. Jagodinski talks of how line plays out in curriculum:

The spacial-temporal experience of line is continually informed by the body’s negotiation between becoming lost and finding a direction. Such

journeys are always packed with ambiguity, paradox and above all surprise. It is the feeling that new vistas, new elevations, new edges are always presenting themselves as each new step is taken...Line is directionality (Pinar and Reynolds, 1992, p.161).

Being lost and then finding our way was repeated throughout Trouble River. We were often steered in an unexpected direction because of what we encountered along the way and did not know where we would end up. I think again about those early mariners who lived their work recognizing there was much they did not know, much they could not control, and were called to respond to that which presented itself.

This intertwined web of experiences is of course, the “life world” to which Husserl alluded in his final writings, 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. It is, indeed nothing other than the biosphere- the matrix of earthly life in which we ourselves are embedded. Yet this is not the biosphere as it is conceived by an abstract and objectifying science, not that complex assemblage of planetary mechanisms presumably being mapped and measures by our remote sensing satellites; it is, rather the biosphere as it is experienced and lived from within by the intelligent body ---by the attentive human animal who is entirely a part of the world that he or she experiences (Abrams, 1997, p. 65).



The lives of the ancient mariners depended upon attending to the “life world”. Watching for sandbars and shoals, changes in cloud formations, all played an important role in determining the possibilities that arise from having to make adjustments that arise out of the question now what!? Where do we go from here and how should we proceed? “It is in the dialectical binary tension between directionality and being lost, between intentionality and accident that new ground can be found and life lived” (Pinar and Reynolds, 1992, p.162). While line is directionality, “experiences are not linear, unidirectional, incremental and cumulative. Rather they [experiences] wander, they move backward and forward, they progress in fits and starts” (Davis, Sumara and Kieren, 1996, p.162).

It is thus that Varela’s (1992: 61) characterization of living as “laying down a path in walking “(versus following a pre-specified path) applies not just to the individual, not just to the realm of human action, but to the entire biosphere: “Many paths of change are potentially possible, and which one is selected is an expression of the kind of structural coherence the unit has, in a continuous tinkering”(In Davis, Sumara and Kieren, 1996, p.158)

The “lifelines” we live and wander are transformative, complex and unpredictable. If line is taken up in curriculum in such a way, the opportunity to visit some surprising places often opens up.

### Re-Tracing

Curricular outlines as maps are a place to begin. They cannot be the journey. In an earlier piece of writing I had claimed that the curricular destination could not

be mapped out in advance. I have had to re-think that a bit because teachers are expected to visit certain destinations with their students. When I consider Trouble River, the plan and the experience, there is correspondence. Every port-of-call outlined on the original plan, we visited. The difference was in how we got there and in the number of other ports we visited. There exists a vast difference between “planned disruption” and “planning for disruption”. The journey was far richer for we walked the terrain ourselves instead of living out the second-hand mapped version. When there is a planned one-to-one correspondence between map and journey, duplication and regurgitation live on.

The primacy of straight clean line in the Western aesthetic tradition (i.e. perspective) is evident from the rationality of the mechanical drawing to the straight edges of our carpentered world. Aesthetics has become a one-dimensional future. Line is required for being minimally rational, but left at this functionalist level it becomes extremely boring and dull. (Pinar and Reynolds, 1992, p.162)

It is when we dare to wander and stray down paths unanticipated, unexpected, that the world comes into sharper focus. When we enter the landscape where intentionality and chance do not stand alone and apart, “but are entwined, each within the other, reinforcing and sustaining the other” (Doll, 1993, p. 280), we are required to participate in the decision making about the journey we are on. It is in this space that generative curriculum lives and breathes, where toeing the line and walking the straight and narrow holds no place, and understanding has a meandering quality to it.

For me, the word meandering conjures up images of leisurely strolls on a beach, through a park or along a riverbank, contexts far removed from the chalk, the blackboards and the desks of the classroom. To suggest that meandering might have a place in generative curriculum, amidst the hustle and bustle that often characterizes the world of teaching and learning, somehow does not seem quite right. How can meandering have a space in curriculum when, “Too much to do and not enough time to do it in” is a familiar and prevalent sentiment with teachers? I turn to Leah’s story for what it has to say about generative curriculum.

## CHAPTER SIX

### RE-FORMING TIME

*Wild geese, suspended  
Float in mid-air stillness, thus  
Time rests in not-time*

(Heider, 1992, p. 90)

*I have many favourite times during a school day but there is something very satisfying about the morning quiet reading time. Perhaps it's the light pouring in from the Eastern sky that adds to the sense of peace and calm. You see, after mid-morning the sunbeams move beyond our space to grace other classrooms in the building. As I look around the room there isn't one face looking back at me. There is something wonderful and remarkable in that. They are all far too absorbed in the text before them to concern themselves with what I'm doing. I wonder when the enchantment with the Sweet Valley High Series will lose its appeal for Samantha. By the look on her face no time soon, I think. From where I am I can see at least three boys lost to the sports stories of Matt Christopher. And there's Robert pouring over the Guinness Book of World Records. How long will it be before he comes over to regale me with one of his astonishing facts... "Mrs. Demcoe did you know that?" 52 children and other than Kyle quietly*

*reading to my teaching partner as well as the comforting drone of the furnace the room is perfectly quiet.*

*As my eyes wander the room trying to decide who should read to me next, Leah's eyes meet mine. She smiles and does that cute little eyebrow thing that Leah does when she has something important to share. I smile back, nodding. With book in hand she approaches.*

*"Mrs. Demcoe do you think that I could recommend this book to the others? It's a good one. I think lots of kids will want to know about it."*

*The book is Where the Sidewalk Ends by Shel Silverstein and Leah is right. It is a book that children enjoy. It is also a book that has been in our classroom forever. I remember many of the Shel Silverstein poems I've read to the class over the two and a bit years I've been with them. In my mind I can picture Lauren giggling over "Boa Constrictor". I can hear Sean saying indignantly "I'd never do that. I love school" upon hearing the poem entitled "Sickness" about a little girl who gives her mother all sorts of ridiculous medical reasons why she should stay home from school, only to be told that it's Saturday. Isn't it funny why today is the day that Leah discovers and falls in love with the work of Shel Silverstein?*

*"Sure you can Leah but I don't know if it'll be this morning or the afternoon, okay? If you look on the chart paper you'll see we have something new, the panel, happening this morning and Mrs. Parks and I don't know how much time it will take. Do you have a favourite poem from that book?"*

*"I have lots," she says seriously.*

*"Why don't you go into the hall and practice reading aloud the ones you like the best? I just know that after your recommendation, when you ask for questions and comments, someone will ask you to read your favourite. What do you think?"*

*"Good idea" she says cheerfully and leaves the room, secure in her knowledge that at some point in the day she'll be able to tell her classmates about the wonderful "new" book she's discovered.*

It is quite remarkable that in remembering this story I feel the same stillness and calm that I experienced, over three years ago, when it happened. But with the memory, there comes a question about what such an ordinary image has to say about generative curriculum. Perhaps it is simply a reminder that generative curriculum lives in the familiar, in the ordinary. Perhaps it is to point out that transformation can happen relatively quietly, within the pages of a book. Books can after all have a profound influence in shaping the life of a reader.

It would be easy to label this image of practice as simply an instance of independent reading and jump to the conclusion that independent reading and generative curriculum are one and the same. But to do so would once again bring the conversation about generative curriculum to a standstill. It is ironic that an image of reading has asserted itself as having something to say about generative curriculum, for at school quiet reading was the thing I loathed the most. It was a period of torture. My eyes spent more time watching the clock, waiting for reprieve, than in reading my book. I know from my own experience

that independent reading does not necessarily insure generative curriculum, but for some reason, this image of quiet reading resonates with me as one that does. What is it about this image of reading that speaks of generative curriculum?

As I watch this interaction with Leah, it strikes me how unimportant clock time seems to be. Interesting, given that in my own experience of quiet reading, the clock figured so prominently. Clock time can be described as objective time (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 65).

We learn in school that a second is a small unit of fixed duration, that sixty of them make a minute, and every minute is equal in length. This conceptualization is made manageable by and dominated by clocks and calendars. (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 64)

I know from the years spent in the classroom that school life demands a certain level of subservience to this conceptualization of time. Yet this vignette suggests a blurring, a lessening, a softening of the “segmented, invariant and linear perception of time” (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 64) that is the dominant cultural view. However, the minute and hour hand in this image of practice is not what determines when and if the book gets shared. The clock’s ever present and incessant tick-tocking played a minor role in determining when we moved on, when things were addressed. I would like to suppose, that Leah’s good-natured response and ready acceptance, that her sharing might have to be postponed, could be read as trust. After all, I had worked with Leah and her classmates for two and one half years at this point. Our relationship was positive and she knew

if I said she could share then she would. Yet as important as trust is to teaching, it is for what this story has to say about time and rhythm in curriculum that I turn to it.

### A Different Kind of Time

While working with Leah the other students were oblivious to me. They were oblivious to the clock on the wall too. Their attention was directed toward the pages of their books. Hunsberger (1992) says to enter the world of text there must be a decision to spend time with the text and a commitment to become involved with and open to the text (p. 66). The calmness in the classroom during this time reflects the student's diminished awareness of their surroundings, as they were soaked up in the pages of their books. "The moment of letting go of the reality of physical surroundings and entering the world of the text is the moment of transition from clock time to inner time and to a different sort of reality (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 66).

In inner time, the fixed temporal order of the world time becomes insignificant as our remembrances of past experiences, knowledge of the world, and predictions about the future, along with our values and visions—our reality—can all simultaneously be brought to bear on the making of a text interpretation (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 67).

It was students deeply engaged with text that I witnessed and remember from that morning. "As readers slipping into inner time will only happen when we are free to let go of the clock and attend whole heartedly to the text" (Hunsberger,



1992, p. 66). The children in my class knew they were free to lose themselves in the pages without fear of interruption. Although the clock played a role here, it was a small one. Our reading time lasted approximately half an hour everyday, twice a day. The students came to reading knowing that there would be no distractions or interruptions. When reading time did end they knew it would not be long until they could return to their books. The diminished presence of the clock goes a long way in allowing inner time a presence.

Although Hunsberger (1992) talks about inner time in the context of reading, its application extends well beyond. By invoking a more generous understanding of text, the notion of inner time has a far richer and deeper contribution to make in understanding curriculum. It is this expanded notion of text that will be used as I proceed through his chapter.

Echoing throughout this notion of inner time are the voices of others. There appears to be a family resemblance between inner time and Gadamer's (1998) notion of presence, where "being present does not simply mean being there along with something else that is there at the same time. To be present means to participate" (p. 124). Threads from earlier chapters can be picked up and woven through this image of practice. "This kind of being present is a self-forgetfulness ...Here self forgetfulness is anything but a privative condition, for it arises from devoting one's full attention to the matter at hand..." (Gadamer, 1998, p.126). Hove (1996) in his comments on wonder alludes to the sense of losing track of

time in wonder's presence. "In wonder, the continuity of thought, language, experience of living itself is momentarily broken: we both stop short and our words fall short" (Hove, 1996, p.450). "Wonder arrests us" (Hove, 1996, p. 449). We are momentarily suspended and time seems to stand still. In my mind's eye, I can see Brett and Kyle fully absorbed in their work, working to the rhythm of their own inner time. It is perhaps when we are fully present before something that the condition allowing clock time to recede is spawned, allowing for a different perception of time to live, as students get lost in relevant, meaning making.

"As long as clock time retains its grip, we must be careful as we read not to slip too fully into the text" (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 66). When everyone's eyes are flashing toward the clock for direction regarding how much time is left to finish an assignment, or to determine what is happening next, attention to the work at hand suffers. Hunsberger (1992) draws our attention to how difficult it is to become fully absorbed into text when an extrinsic contingency is factored in.

The reading that is done solely for an ulterior purpose such as getting to sleep or killing time in an airport or a doctor's office does not originate so much from a wish to become acquainted with a particular text as from a desire to make the time pass, since what we are really doing in those circumstances is not reading but waiting. As long as the mind attends to the clock rather than the text, the waiting continues and the minutes drag, as the voice of the text is submerged (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 70).

When the text, be it punch manure, circle or storybook, is allowed to speak the learner can drift. Not an aimless kind of drifting but one that directs and propels, generates momentum toward understanding. Generative curriculum gives permission to drift. When ulterior purposes are forgotten, when expectations are suspended, when we allow ourselves to respond in a way so we are subsumed and enveloped by the text, then meandering no longer seems a misfit. Its presence seems natural and productive to understanding. In listening to text clock time recedes, inner time takes over and pathways are opened.

When clocks play a prominent role in determining the pulse of curriculum, then attention floats and hovers on the surface. This, too, is an instance of drifting but drifting of an unproductive nature. When “temporality is construed as a series of linear events that can be broken down and segmented into units” (Shapiro, Richards, Ross and Kendall-Knitter, 1999, p. 8) this leads to shallow curriculum concerned with “trivial bits and pieces rather than deep understandings of subject matter” (Shapiro et al., 1999, p. 8). Meandering requires a different relationship to the clock. Just as Brett’s story shows the importance of the learner’s relationship with the topic, Leah’s story has something to say about the learner’s relationship to time. It calls attention to her own need to drift, to dwell with Shel Silverstein’s work before she could make sense of the humour in his poetry. Generative curriculum pays attention to the learner’s lived experience of time. In the confines of the school structure, one can never truly be freed from clock watching.

We are caught in a dichotomy in which we know cognitively that hours are invariant and linear but we simultaneously know experientially that hours vary greatly and that segmentation feels superimposed upon us (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 65).

I live the tension between clock time and inner time. It is in the synchronized space between trying to forget clock time and privileging inner time that generative curriculum gets played out. The story calls attention to a more fluid, seamless conception of time, one that honors inner time, for it is there, that meandering stands a chance.

### Dwelling in Conversation

The panel mentioned at the conclusion of the opening vignette arose from an article that Becky, one of the students, had brought to class. This aspect of the vignette also has a contribution to make about the “seamlessness” of time in generative curriculum. The article was about the relocation of several Alberta grizzlies to Montana. Some of the students were interested in presenting the article to the rest of their classmates. Becky had brought it to class because it was relevant to an ongoing conversation about the changing landscape that had started the previous year. It had strong connections to our mutual past. How long this particular morning’s conversation would last was uncertain. To use Gadamer’s (1998) phraseology “we fell into conversation, we became involved in it” (p. 383) not knowing whether it would last 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 30 minutes

or longer. Once again, meandering shows itself as belonging and being part of this work.

The way one word followed another, with the conversation taking twists and reaching its own conclusion, may well be conducted in some way, but the partners conversing are far less the leaders of it than the led. No one knows in advance what will come out of the conversation (Gadamer, 1998, p. 383).

Again, it was not the clock that determined the length of this conversation, although the recess bell did interrupt its flow. It was the level of interest in meandering the pathways that were opened by the questions and ideas raised, that sustained conversation, kept it going. There was no set agenda heading into this conversation. Does generative curriculum advocate aimlessness? The answer “No” shouts back. Like play, conversation can be entered into without a preset end in mind. Also like play, there is a meandering quality to it. The conversation that morning traveled here and there and came to its termination naturally and gracefully. Typical of any satisfying, engaging conversation it did not require any one of the participants to draw it to a close. Certainly when this conversation drew to a close we knew it was not over. It would resurface at some other time.

One of the Latin roots for the word conversation is *conversari*, meaning “to dwell with” (Yinger, 1988, p.82). Generative curriculum is to dwell in conversation.

Perhaps it is the importance of the time given to conversation that this image practice brings forth. The conversation that happens after quiet reading time is worth mentioning. This was an opportunity for students to talk about their reading, about the book. Sometimes it was a simple comment like, “I’m reading Matt Christopher’s latest novel. It’s about hockey. I bet you’d like it Mark!” More often than not, however, students would talk about what had struck a chord, what they were having difficulty with, why a person in the novel “bugged” them, or made connections to other things happening in their lives either in or out of school. Conversations were enjoyed, there was no rush to move on, away from them. Sometimes the conversation got put on the back burner but more often than not it eventually boiled over and drew attention back to itself. The seamless nature of continuation, rather than discrete starts and endings, comes forth as a dimension of generative learning experiences.

### The Looping Quality of Generative Curriculum

This image of simmering casts light on the movement of generative curriculum that takes place between past, present and future. Spurling (1977) writes:

The future and the past are experienced as the horizons of my living present. The future is that toward which my task and projects are directed and hence it is that which makes sense of my present since it defines the orientation, or at least the style, of my present actions.

The past is an ever-receding platform to my present situation, yet which is subject to continual re-interpretation in the light of my present and future

projects. Future and past are not points on a line but intentionalities that anchor me to my environment. (In Hunsberger, 1992, p. 65)

There is a looping quality to generative curriculum as it recursively folds back on itself, to propel forward. Both the past and the future inform curriculum decisions of the here and now. “Just as the horizon is needed in order to locate ourselves in space (being in thick fog is disorienting), so the past and future are a necessary part of our sense of the present and of our sense-making”. (Hunsberger, 1992, p. 65).

The grizzly bear conversation was not a disconnected event. It evolved from prior conversation and shaped future work. Generative curriculum is neither free-floating nor groundless but connected and grounded. The words of Whitehead have a contribution to make. He says “Do not teach too many subjects and “What you teach, teach thoroughly...Let the main ideas which are introduced into the child's education be few and important, and let them be thrown into every combination possible” (Whitehead, 1963, p. 14). Looping and gathering threads from previous conversations is part of throwing the important ideas into every combination, and that takes time.

Yinger (1988) comments that:

The preoccupation of many poets with the present and the new cuts off both writer and reader from the longevity of human experience: what is

practicable, and what is imaginable. Our past is not merely something to depart from: it is to commune with, to speak with: “Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge”[Psalm19:2]. Remove this sense of continuity, and we are left with the thoughtless present tense of machines. If we fail to see that we live in the same world that Homer lived in, then we not only misunderstand Homer we misunderstand ourselves. (p. 78)

Generative curriculum has an interesting relationship to time, both honouring and ignoring it. Generative curriculum honours the passage of time by continually returning to the past in an attempt to understand. This back-and-forth movement across time is important to generative curriculum. It was an important part of Kyle's story. It was an important part of the “panel conversation”. However, this recursive aspect of generative curriculum gets lived in the diminished presence of the clock. The decision as to how curriculum is lived resides not with the movement of the hands of the clock but elsewhere.

### Responsiveness and Lived Time

Watchfulness emerges as a theme in this story of practice, a watchfulness for who's doing what, anticipating. The phrase “on the look out for”, introduced in the last chapter seems relevant in the context of time. I wonder, if a significant component of how time gets lived, resides in the movement between noticing something and responding to it? Is it in being “on the look out for” that objective time loses its stranglehold on how curriculum unfolds?



Perhaps the phrase “on the look out for” might better be worded as “looking out for”. The difference is subtle but important. The change injects an element of care and concern that is less evident in the first phrase. “Looking out for” suggests someone’s best interests are at the heart of the matter. It strikes me in the course of looking out for that another manifestation of rhythm is borne. The impetus behind rhythm in generative curriculum might lie in the sensitive interplay between noticing and responding between “on the look out for” and “looking out for”.

Hove (1996) draws our attention to the importance of the nature of the response given to each student. “Our response must sensitively take into account the innermost recesses of the questioner in his relations with the world” (Hove, 1996, p. 448). If this is so, then the invariant quality, the third adjective used by Hunsberger (1992) to describe clock time, interferes with the sensitivity that is needed to respond well and thoughtfully. When eyes “regard” the clock, looking for direction as to what should be happening next in curriculum, there exists a blatant “disregard” for how students’ live time and how they need it to be lived. Leah’s discovery of Shel Silverstein never gets told, the circle never gets renewed, Brett gets “stuck” with wolves because the project is due in two days, when clocks “manage” curriculum. This image of practice is important for it serves to highlight generative curriculum attentiveness to what it means to be a being who lives time.

### Re-Tracing

Generative curriculum's relationship to time is complex. It is a relationship that values the "divergence, chaos and intellectual meandering...needed for a deep experience in learning" (Shapiro et al., 1999, p.10). Inner time and conversation are central in allowing this to happen. "On the look out for" and "looking out for" also play an important role. Informed by care and interest, implied in "looking out for", each student's lived experience of time is valued as he or she negotiates their way through curriculum. How time gets lived in generative curriculum necessitates an attunement to the signs that will help steer a particular child toward understanding. Generative curriculum is about responding well. Part of the sensitivity and attunement needed, comes from a simultaneous disregard for clock time while embracing time of a different sort. Meandering lives in this negotiated space. One that encourages children to dwell in their inner time, allowing them to be fully present, whether with ponch manure, circles or clay in an environment where the clock has a limited presence.

Each story in this work speaks in their own way to the multiple facets of what it means to live time in generative curriculum. Brett, Kyle, Anna and Leah, along with the other children appearing in the preceding chapters, shed light on the lived experience of time in generative curriculum. I now re-trace my steps to consider what else they might collectively have to say about generative curriculum.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### RE-COLLECTING GENERATIVE CURRICULUM

*“As in spinning threads we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through the whole length but in the over lapping of many fibres”*

(Wittgenstein, in Jardine, 1994, p. 19)

In each of the other chapters I began with a particular story of practice, each image reflecting its own character and its own uniqueness. They are important stories because no other story bears their relation to generative curriculum in just that way. It is time for me to turn my eyes away from each individual instance to regard the whole of generative curriculum in its entirety. The time has come to step back in order to see what it is, taken together, these stories have to say about the whole phenomenon of generative curriculum. For just as the quilt is more than fabric, batting and stitches so too is generative curriculum more than stories of students, teacher and “program of studies”. They both have larger stories to tell.

Traditionally, quilts have enjoyed a strong association with weddings, births and deaths. Quilts are rooted in the stories of groups of people living their lives together. For these people the quilt is much more than pieces of stitched fabric

for they tell stories of love, joy and comfort, of sadness, loss and tragedy. The history of quilting shows a deep connectedness with particular lives and particular contexts. Generative curriculum too evolves from the lives we actually live and on the ground on which it happens. Brett's question about ponch manure, Kyle's query about circle, Anna's concern with history, were all embedded in the complexities of life, as well as, in the life we were leading as a class. For curriculum to generate meaning, genuine questions, interest, a sense of wonder, to open up possibilities, to be transformative, it has to belong to someone, some class and evolve within their lived context. Generative curriculum lives locally and flourishes under a particular set of circumstances. Transplanting ponch manure, for instance, as a unit of study to be duplicated with other classes, ignores the fertile ground in which it took root. In generalizing ponch manure it becomes severed from the particular set of circumstances that breathed life into it in the first place.

This notion of belonging is key for not only does it speak of generative curriculum's ties to a particular set of circumstances, but also, like quilts, generative curriculum speaks of ties to the past. In both cases the horizons of past, present and future weave their texts in a process of creation and transformation. Many quilt stories tell of how the bridal quilts of grandmothers are transformed into their grandchildren's baby quilts, and of how special articles of clothing of one generation are incorporated into the quilts of the next. Remembering heritage is the legacy of quilting. Generative curriculum issues

the same invitation to take up the world re-membering its living past: A past that has much to say about both the present and the future. As Kyle discovered, circle has a rich, storied past. It is in re-membering the circle's connectedness to life, in re-viewing circle as having an ancestry, a heritage, that encourages generative curriculum. Through Kyle the circle was re-vitalized. Generative work is concerned with "disrupting the fossilized sedimentations of sense, desiring to open them up and allow the new to erupt and thus allowing the old and already established and familiar to regenerate and renew itself" (Jardine, 1992, p.60). It is no accident that there is a preponderance of words sporting "re" prefixes in this text. "Re" means "again", "anew", "once more" (Allen, 1984, p. 616). Words beginning in this manner draw attention to the interpretive nature of this work where returning, to have another look, another listen reconstitutes the phenomenon differently.

In the absence of belonging a lifeless, static curriculum is produced, devoid of any sense of lived origin. Canada becomes Mounties and beavers. All Canadians become afflicted with a speech defect recognized as "eh?", eat back bacon and wear toques. "We live in a world that is fully alive, full not of lifeless objects and objective mechanisms, but of voices and signs and intent, to which each case adds irreplaceable and fecund difference" (Jardine, 1994, p. 110). The particular cannot be taken up as an isolated incident for then it stands apart from us disconnected from any other thing. It silences Canada and each particular Canadian, as their voices, their identities, are consumed into some generic,

frozen instance. Generative curriculum is an invitation to keep the conversation flowing between “the new/young and the established /old texts and textures of human life” (Jardine 1992, p. 60). Belonging moves against static objectivism by re-membering ancestry.

Curriculum that sees the world and its inhabitants as objects, diminishes any sense of responsibility for their well-being, for its concern is with mastery and control. In viewing the world as vital and evolving, generative curriculum concerns itself with what it means to live together well. The voice of a colleague, who belongs to a quilting group, resonates as she described quilting as a “labour of love, of friendship and giving”. The care that is part of quilting’s history is also part of generative curriculum’s story. There is a pedagogic watchfulness that is central to generative curriculum. It is through watching and caring that “the child who went forth each day” (Whitman, 1996, p. 386) stands a chance. Generative curriculum is the gift of knowing the world in a particular way, one that allows the learner to dwell in wonder.

Generative curriculum is about acquiring understanding through “wonder”, “uncertainty”, “self-forgetfulness”, “playfulness”, “disruption”, “undetermined possibilities”, and “meandering”. Understanding begins... when something particular addresses us (Gadamer, 1998, p. 299). It is the richness of these particular instances that re-verses curriculum from that of distanced objectivism to curriculum as the inclusion of life. It is what these particular

instances can open up and reveal about our lives together that make them generative, for it requires re-thinking and re-viewing on route to understanding. Taken together Brett, Kyle, Anna and Leah generate a “curriculum quilt” threaded with heritage and ancestry, belonging and care, multivocality and vitality. These fibres, twisted together, are the tradition to which generative curriculum belongs.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### IT'S ONLY SEMANTICS, ISN'T IT?

*The Mock Turtle went on:*

*"We had the best of education-in fact, we went to school every day"*

*"And how many hours a day did you do lessons?" said Alice, in a hurry to change the subject.*

*"Ten hours the first day, " said the Mock Turtle, nine the next, and so on."*

*"What a curious plan!"*

*That's the reason they're called lessons, " the Gryphon remarked; Because they lesson from day to day."*

*This was quite a new idea to Alice, and she thought it over a little before she made her next remark. "Then the eleventh day must have been a holiday?"*

*"Of course it was," said the Mock Turtle.*

*"And how did you manage on the twelfth?"*

(Carroll, (1865) 1998, p. 107)

In the course of doing this work, portals have been opened and new vistas revealed. I have wandered and meandered their landscapes. I have stumbled, fallen and been lost. At times I have been surprised and caught off guard by what I have seen and heard. One further opening presents itself, perhaps as a way for me to gather the threads, to bring this work to temporary closure. Once again it is a child's voice to which I listen: Alice is not a child who I have taught but a child who has helped me teach. I have read her words many times, as a



child, as a mother, as a teacher and now as a graduate student. On each reading I have been both amused and appreciative of the clever use of language. However, in my most recent encounter with this passage, the play on words affected me differently. I found myself empathizing with Alice as she tried to make sense of language that was familiar yet no longer carried with it the meaning she had come to expect. In many ways the heart of this work reflects this conundrum in which Alice finds herself. Like Alice, I too have had to pause to make sense of words that no longer resemble themselves. In doing this work, I have become somewhat suspicious of and awed by language's power and possibilities.

I remember a few years ago sitting in a graduate class on curriculum theory, when the discussion turned to the role language plays in curriculum. At one point the debate centred on different curricular words and what these words might have to say about practice. I remember wondering what the big deal was about language. Surely one word was as good as another. Surely it was simply a matter of semantics! Michael Polyani (1962) says that "when we use words in speech or writing we are aware of them only in a subsidiary manner (p. 57) At this point, this was the level of my understanding of language. It was simply there carrying out the function I had assigned it, whether as a greeting, by way of congratulations, as a warning, or in my work. It was simply an instrumental tool, no more no less. Much like Alice, I too, took words at face value, oblivious to their potential.

At a certain level, I suppose I was aware of the power of language. Anyone who has lived any length of time in this world has most likely experienced the fallacy of the children's verse, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." For words do hurt, and comfort, and frighten and confuse. Yet even this understanding of the power of language carries with it an overt instrumentality. It has been in the context of this work that another side of language has been revealed to me, its power to shape how we are in this world. It has been in the hope of generating a language, to help me talk about the "wonder-land" of curriculum, that I have come face to face with the complicit role that language has played in keeping me silent.

Language in use is like the windowpane that without calling attention to itself or getting in the way of our vista allows us to focus on the objects outside. But language is not only transparent. It also structures our interpretations in a way that we usually remain unaware of. Language like the windowpane has a certain shape of its own which, outside of the user's awareness, may magnify or diminish the objects seen through it. Like the windowpane, language can have a distorting effect. But even more than this, and here the analogy with the window fails, language is not only the aperture to an already made world, but helps constitute that world. It would be as if the window played a part in designing the objects that could be seen through it (Gallagher, 1992, p. 114).

I have been looking through a particular window for a long time, one encased within the technical rational frame. The frame not only channeled my line of sight toward a particular view of what is beyond but also at the same time has framed me. By looking through this aperture I have been “set up” to see the world, to speak the world and to be in the world in a particular way. Palmer (1969) comments on this.

Language shapes man's [sic] seeing and his thoughts—both his conception of himself and his [sic] world (the two are not separate as they may seem). His [sic] very vision is shaped by language the various facets of his [sic] living – his[sic] worshipping, loving, social behaviour, abstract thought: even the shape of his feelings is conformed to language (p. 9).

Lying before me is the photograph of myself as a young teacher. As I look at it I am reminded of the words I used back then to describe my practice. Armed with the parlance of unit plans and objectives, taught to me in my methods courses and reinforced in subsequent professional in-services and workshops, I was positioned to take up curriculum in a particular way. This language, framed by certainty and technique, shaped my work in the classroom.

As I reflect back across the years it dawns on me just how much of my career has been immersed within the language of method without me even realizing it. All I have to do is think upon the number of workshops I have attended that have been slanted toward “technical application” encased in “this is how to do it”

language. I can remember going to a series of in-services on "Community of Readers". I came away from those sessions with a clear understanding of the do's and don'ts associated with it. I came away knowing how many books would be required for a class of 25, how many copies of each title was necessary, how many students per group was most effective and how long each reading session should last. In addition, I was given sample tracking sheets, as well as lists of suggested response questions that students could use in responding to the novel they were reading. All in all I left the workshops with a relatively clear idea about what I needed to do to get "Community of Readers" up and running in my classroom. Countless other workshops I attended followed the same format in that I came away with handouts and suggestions and a sense that if I follow these steps I could get started. For a long time I expected the learning of curriculum ideas to come with steps to follow, to guide their implementation. The language of method has played a significant role in my life as a teacher, as well as the lives of my colleagues. It has dominated.

"Wonder", "uncertainty", "self- forgetfulness", "playfulness", "disruption", "undetermined possibilities", "meandering" are not the words of my training but of my experience as an educator. These are the curricular words that help me capture the paradoxical nature of generative curriculum... "orchestrated uncertainty". They fit well with what unfolds in the classroom when "life's messiness" is allowed a presence. They fit well with a curriculum that makes a place for disruption. It has been in watching and listening to particular students

over the years, as they encountered curriculum that drew my attention to the gap between my language of curriculum and the lived experience of it. It has been the tension between what I have learned about curriculum through working with children, and an inherited curriculum language that has demanded I reconsider the language I use. Generative curriculum requires a different sort of language. A language that lives well with the uncertainty that is part of the practice of generative curriculum. Gadamer (1998) says, "language speaks us" (p. 463). The words we use make us. The curriculum words we speak, the way we are in the classroom, tell much about the window through which we gaze. "Wonder", "uncertainty", "self- forgetfulness", "playfulness", "disruption", "undetermined possibilities", "meandering" speak not only of a different kind of curriculum but also of a different kind of teacher.

The silence around generative curriculum is more complex than I originally assumed. As I suspected the silence has not simply been due to a lack of the right words. The silence is tied to the traditions that are carried within language itself. Part of the difficulty in trying to understand generative curriculum, to open up conversation around it, is that it is done from within a language that tends to silence. It is from within the language steeped in a technical rational tradition that I have tried to understand the silence. By revisiting images from my practice, I have come to understand that the language of certainty has a silencing quality. Curriculum that covers concepts as predetermined entities, as though they have already been decided, removes the need for discussion. My frustration in trying

to have a conversation with colleagues about generative curriculum originates here. The desire to name, to reduce generative curriculum, is to succumb to the lure of certainty that belongs to a language that is not generative. The etymology of the word generative reveals “unusual ability”, “potential”, “power”, “energy”, “vigour”, “growth” and “production” (Kuhn, 1963, p. 68); to try to speak of generative curriculum in reductionist ways, to maintain the status quo, brings the conversation to a halt. I have already suggested that how we speak reflects the window through which we gaze, how we listen, and to what we attend is also framed by that window. Positioned within a discourse that values certainty and technique, the ear is sensitized to listen closely for the words that fit within this frame.

In the opening chapter, I likened many of my conversations with colleagues to two parallel monologues. I now have a much better understanding of how language has played a hand in fueling this. Heidegger says, “Man [sic] acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains master of man (Gallagher, 1992, p.104). Unpacking the silence around generative curriculum has shown this. While the shaping power of language has been revealed to me, I also realize it is not possible to completely shed a language and its traditions. So the question that has me deep in wonder is how is it possible to engage colleagues in conversation about generative curriculum given the constraints of language? It is a question that needs careful consideration.

As I write, a phrase I have callously used over the years, when talking about generative curriculum intrudes...“changing paradigms.” I say callously, for this work has shown this to be far larger and more complex undertaking that I ever realized. Changing paradigms is not the simple action that I thought it to be. There is more to it than simply abandoning one ship for another. It involves entering into the multiple evolving traditions that shape who we are. Changing paradigms involves being in the world differently. It means a change to self and how that self is in this world, and language is a part of it. The language of generative curriculum is not only a verbal matter but also a matter of orientation to the world. Generative curriculum belongs to an orientation that asks us to be sensitive to the words we use for they say more than we think.

It has been in the course of doing this work that I have come to understand the power of language. Language has blocked access to generative curriculum while at the same time it has been the vehicle through which I have been able to make sense of it. Language has been both “in my way” and “my way in”. Like generative curriculum itself, language is paradoxical in nature. Neither generative curriculum nor language is “an either/or” proposition but a “both”. With respect to generative curriculum, its vitality, its force, its very being comes from its “bothness”...self-forgetfulness and self-remembering, chance and direction, familiar and unfamiliar. It’s from its partiality toward inclusion and in welcoming possibilities that generativity is born. It is no wonder the silence persisted so long given that I have been positioned to apprehend curriculum as one thing and only

one thing, encased in a language punctuated with certainty and univocity. I have come to understand the silence around generative curriculum as an outgrowth of the impoverished and ungenerous language that dominates curriculum. To learn about generative curriculum is to learn about language's "unusual ability".



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abram, D. (1997). The spell of the sensuous: Perception and language in a more than human world. New York: Pantheon Books.

Allen, R. E. (Ed.). (1990) The Oxford dictionary of current English (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Aoki, T. (1986, April-May). Teaching as in-dwelling between two curriculum worlds. The B.C. Teacher, 65(3), 8-10.

Aoki, T. (1992). Layered voices of teaching: The uncannily correct and the elusively true. In W. F. Pinar and W. M. Reynolds (Ed.), Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text (pp.17-27). New York. Teachers College Press.

Applebee, A. (1996). Curriculum as conversation: Transforming traditions of teaching and learning. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Aristotle (1998). The Nichomachean Ethics. (D. Ross, Trans) Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.

- Brooks, J.G. (1990, February). Teachers and students: Constructivists forging new connections. Education Leadership, 68-71.
- Cameron, B. (1992). The nursing "how are you?". Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 10, 172-185.
- Caputo, J. (1987). Radical hermeneutics: Repetition, deconstruction, and the hermeneutic project. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Caroll, L. (1998). Alice's adventures in wonderland, and Through the looking glass. New York: Gossett and Dunlap. (Original work published 1865).
- Clandinin, D. J. (1986). Classroom Practice: Teacher images in action. London: Falmer.
- Clifford, P. and Friesen S. L. (1993, Fall). A curious plan: Managing on the Twelfth. Harvard Educational Review, 63(3), 339-358.
- Cochran-Smith, M. (1991, August). Learning to teach against the grain. Harvard Educational Review, 61(3), 279-309.

Connelly, F.M. and Clandinin, D.J. (1988). Teachers as curriculum planners. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Davis, A.B., Sumara, D. and Kieren, T.E. (1996). Cognition, co-emergence, curriculum. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 28(2), 151-169.

Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (1994). Handbook of qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1996). Interpretive ethnography: Ethnographic practices for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. CA:Sage.

Dewey J. (1956). The child and the curriculum; The school and society. Chicago: University of Chicago.

Dewey, J. (1963). Experience in education. New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

Dewey, J. (1964). Democracy and education. New York: The MacMillan Company. (Original work published 1916).

Doll, W. E. (1989). Foundations for a post-modern curriculum. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 21(3), 243-253.

Doll, W. E. (1993, Summer). Curriculum possibilities in a “post”- future. Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 8(4), 277-292.

Egan, K. (1989, February). Memory, imagination and learning: connected by the story. Phi Delta Kappan, 455-459.

Egan, K. (1997). The educated mind: How cognitive tools shape our understanding. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Eliot, T. S. (1978). Four Quartets. In Gardner, H. (1978). The composition of Four Quartets. London: Faber and Faber.

Ellsworth, E. (1989, August). Why doesn't this feel empowering? Working through the repressive myths of critical pedagogy. Harvard Educational Review, 59(3), 297-324.

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the oppressed. New York: Herder and Herder.

Frost, R. (1969). The road not taken. In E. C. Lathem (Ed.), The poetry of Robert Frost. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1998). Truth and Method (2<sup>nd</sup> Rev. ed.) (J.Weinsheimer and D. Marshall, Trans.) New York: Continuum. (Original work published 1960).

Gallagher, S. (1992). Hermeneutics and education. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Greene, M. (1995 ). Releasing the imagination: Essays on education, the arts and social change. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Grumet, M. R. (1992). Existential and phenomenological foundations of autobiographical methods. In W.F. Pinar and W.M. Reynolds (Eds.), Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text (pp. 28-43), New York: Teachers College Press.

Grumet, M. and Pinar W. F. (1993). The curriculum; What are the basics and are we teaching them? In J. L. Kincheloe and S. R. Steinberg (Eds.), Thirteen questions: reframing education's conversation (pp. 23-38). New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Heider, W. (1992). Not time. In W.F. Pinar and W. M. Reynolds (Eds.), Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text . New York: Teachers College Press.

- Heidegger, M. (1962). Being and time. (J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, Trans.) New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, M. (1998). Pathmarks. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press (Original work published in 1967).
- Hove, P. (1996). The face of wonder. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 28(4), 437-462.
- Hunsberger, M. (1992). The time of texts. In W.F. Pinar and W. M. Reynolds (Eds.), Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text (pp. 64-91). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Jackson, P. W. (1968). Life in the Classroom. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Jackson P. W. (Ed.). (1992). Handbook of research on curriculum. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- jagodinski, j. (1992). Curriculum as felt through six layers of an aesthetically embodied skin: the arch writing on the body. In W. F. Pinar and W. M. Reynolds (Eds.), Understanding curriculum as phenomenological and deconstructed text (pp. 159-183). New York: Teachers College Press.

Jardine, D. W. (1992) Reflections on education, hermeneutics and ambiguity:  
Hermeneutics as a restoring life to its original difficulty. In W. F.Pinar and  
W. M. Reynolds (Eds.), Understanding curriculum as phenomenological  
and deconstructed text (pp. 116- 127). New York: Teachers College  
Press.

Jardine, D.W. (1992). The fecundity of the individual case: Considerations of the  
pedagogic heart of interpretive work. Journal of Philosophy of Education,  
26(1), 51-61.

Jardine, D.W. (1994). Speaking with a boneless tongue. Bragg Creek, AB:  
Makyo Press.

Jardine, D.W. & Clandinin, J.D (1987). Does it rain on Vancouver Island?:  
Teaching as story telling, Curriculum Inquiry, 17(4), 471-480.

Jardine, D.W., Lagrange, A. and Everest, B. (1998). In these shoes a silent call  
of the earth: Meditations on curriculum integration, conceptual violence  
and the ecologies of community and place. Canadian Journal of  
Education, 23(2), 121-130.

Kuhn, S. M. (Ed.). (1963). Middle English dictionary (Vol. 4). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1994). The dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African American children. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Manen, M. van (1990). The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness. London, ON: The Althouse Press.

MacPherson, E. D. (1995). Chaos in the curriculum. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 27(3), 263-279.

Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). Phenomenology of perception. (C. Smith, Trans.) London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

Michaels, A. (1996). Fugitive Pieces. Toronto, On: McClelland & Stewart Inc.

Neatby, H. (1953). So little for the mind. Canada: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited.

Noddings, N. (1992). The challenge of care in schools: An alternative approach to education. New York: Teachers College Press.



- Oliver, D. (1990, September). Grounded knowing: A postmodern perspective on teaching and learning. Educational Leadership, 64-69.
- Palmer, R.E. (1969). Hermeneutics: Interpretation theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer. Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press.
- Peterson, T. and Hart, T. (1997, Summer). Pedagogy for the soul: Re-visioning of spirit in education. Educational Horizons, 75(4), 187-191.
- Phelan, A. (2000). The death of a child and the birth of practical wisdom. Studies in Philosophy and Education, 1-15.
- Polyani, M. (1962). Personal knowledge: Towards a post-critical philosophy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Prawat, R.S. (1996, January-February). Learning community, commitment and school reform. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 28(1), 91-110.
- Shapiro, B., Richards, L., Ross, N. and Kendal-Knitter, K. (1999). Time and the environments of schooling. Learning Environments Research 2, 1-19.

- Smith, D. (1991). Hermeneutic inquiry: The hermeneutic imagination and the pedagogic text. In E. Short, (Ed.), Forms of Curriculum Inquiry (pp. 187-209). New York: Suny Press.
- Smith, D. (1994). Pedagon: Meditations on pedagogy and culture. Bragg Creek, AB: Mayko Press.
- Sullivan, M. (1990). Matters of consequence. Phenomenology and Pedagogy, 8, 61-74.
- Tyler, R. (1949). Basic principles of curriculum and instruction. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Whitehead, A.N. (1963). The aims of education. New York: Mentor Books.  
(Original work published 1929).
- Whitman, W. (1996). The complete book of poems. London: Penguin Books.
- Wilde, S. (1996). Awakening care: A possibility at the heart of teaching. Master's thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.
- Willinsky, J. (1991) Postmodern literacy: A primer. Interchange 22(4) 56-76.

Yinger, R.J. (1988) The conversation of practice. In P.Grimmett and G.L. Erickson (Eds.), Reflections in Teacher Education (pp. 73-94). New York: Teachers College Press.

Yolen, J. (1993). Briar Rose. New York: Tom Doherty Associates Book.