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Dwelling With the Gift: Teaching and Responsive Reading

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Abstract

This hermeneutic study interprets the meaningfulness of responsive reading in the contexts of parenting and teaching. It explores the need for an understanding of relationship that is central to supporting, promoting, and fostering the development of young readers. It weaves together different stories told of reading relationships -- stories of childhood memories, of children and texts in conversation, of selected written works, of parenting, and of teaching. This study reads the stories of reading and the stories of teaching as threads interwoven in the web of pedagogy.

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Dedication

For

My mother, gift giver

My children, may we protect the gift and further its tradition

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Teaching young children to read is not a particularly difficult task. Put children with their natural curiosity together with a competent reader (parent, teacher, peer), with the time and inclination to watch over the children as they come into contact with books, magazines, stories, comics, signs, and so on, and almost unawares youngsters will confidently declare: "I can read." Like any other form of learning, learning to read is a relational activity—it depends upon a relationship. Any crisis in literacy is, then, preeminently a crisis of relationship.

David G. Smith, Pedagon: Meditations on Pedagogy and Culture

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

There are readings – of the same text - that are dutiful, readings that map and dissect, readings that hear a rustling of unheard sounds, that count little grey pronouns for pleasure or instruction and for a time do not hear golden or apples. There are personal readings, that snatch for personal meanings, I am full of love, or disgust, or fear, I scan for love, or disgust, or fear. There are – believe it – impersonal readings - where the mind's eye sees the lines move onwards and the mind's ear hears them sing and sing.

Now and then there are readings which make the hairs on the neck, the non-existent pelt, stand on end and tremble, when every word burns and shines hard and clear and infinite and exact, like stones of fire, like points of stars in the dark – readings when the knowledge that we *shall know* the writing differently or better or satisfactorily, runs ahead of any capacity to say what we know, or how. In these readings, a sense that the text has appeared to be wholly new, never before seen, is followed, almost immediately, by the sense that it was *always there*, that we the readers, knew it was always there, and have *always known* it was as it was, though we have now for the first time recognized, become fully cognisant of, our knowledge. (Byatt, 1990, pp. 471-472)

I *need* a good book, you *have* to read this book, you will *fall in love* with this book, you will *die* when you read this book, after reading this book I have a new *respect* for, please read this book I *desperately need* someone to *talk with* about it. The language that beckons us, persuades us, appeals to our emotions, and invites us to undertake journeys with text surrounds us. It is evocative, worldly,

earthy language. Language that, in reading and talking about reading, pulls at our roots tugging them trying to reveal something about ourselves and the world we live in. In revealing the roots of our reading we are both exposed and concealed. The favorite book has something to say about who we are and who we are not. Reading has something to say about who we are and who we are in relation to this world we share with others. “Why do you read?” I read to understand— to understand more about myself, about the nature of reading, about the world, and about others in the world. In reading I encounter others and they have something to teach me that I could not learn on my own. We become who we are in the presence of what we read, and in the presence of those with whom we converse about what we read. Others teach us through the language of reading. A language that sometimes expands our roots allowing them to take in more nourishment, opening ourselves to more possibilities. Increasing our generosity and vibrancy. The language of reading we understand by living in it. It is language that invites us to converse about what the world is like. In engaging with books I read and am read.

The topic of reading, response, and the development of the responsive reader has long been a companion of mine. At times it has been beside me, ghostly clutching my hand as I encounter experiences that help to shape my understanding, experiences that shape my understanding of past, present, and possibilities for the future. At times it has lived quietly in the background, gently supporting the

everydayness of my actions. Sometimes it has thrust itself to the forefront demanding investigation, recognition and reconfiguration, and in turn, some experiences have pushed it forward, shining the light directly upon our companionship. Its varied presence accompanies and positions me in many aspects of my life — reader, parent, teacher.

In seeking to understand this phenomenon I must acknowledge our history. I must remember events that helped to shape my experiences and the choices I have made— remembering to understand how we have come to be companions, how our relationship has developed, seeking out some of our lineage and ancestry. Understanding how the eventfulness of responsive reading arrived and to whom I owe its arrival. Understanding that responsive reading is itself a living out of legacies, it exists in the world, it is part of an interrelated and interweaving web of relations. Acknowledging that it is this itself that makes understanding possible. “Understanding is an open historical process in which the interpreter understands within an already constituted interpretation.” (Risser, 1997, p. 4)

“Now and then there are readings... when every word burns and shines hard and clear and infinite and exact, like stones of fire, like points of stars in the dark...” (Byatt, 1990). These are the kinds of readings I strive to engage in. I seek them out - - looking in obscure places, in public places, waiting for them to cross my path so that I may experience their intensity. As a parent and teacher, I strive to

live richly in a storied space with children. I want to be able to provide children with shared reading experiences that encourage, prompt, push, and gently nudge them into a world of literature. I seek to engender in children openness to the possibilities presented by engaging responsively and responsibly with texts. As a lover of language, literature, poetry, conversation, and reading I passionately want to share profound literature events with children.

Most of us go into teaching not for fame and fortune but because of a passion to connect. We feel a deep kinship with some subject; we want to bring students into that relationship, to link them with the knowledge that is so life-giving to us. (Palmer, 1993, p. x)

I seek to engage with children in literature events to bring them into relationship with literature, for children are formed by the reading they do, by the views of self, others and the world they encounter in reading. For we live what we learn, and we learn what we live. Our relationship to what we have learned shapes the relationship of self to the world.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore events of reading and responses to reading through and with young children. It seeks to explore the phenomenon of the developing responsive reader. Exploring responsiveness as part of and within the developing reader, it seeks to open up the topic through shared reading events with children. How do young readers experience reading events? What does it mean to be responsive to stories? What difference do responsive reading events

make in understanding our selves, others and the world? This study is grounded in the instances of reading events with young children— my own children, their peers, and children I have taught. It is lived events of reading that create a space in which to meet and explore the nature of our relationships with each other and the world, explorations that create possibilities and illuminate images of teaching. It employs children's literature and response to explore these relationships and therefore the nature of pedagogy.

Everything connects and connects - all the time - and I suppose one studies - I study - literature because all these connections seem both endlessly exciting and then in some sense dangerously powerful - as though we held a clue to the true nature of things. (Byatt, 1990, p. 253)

This research seeks to explore the connections between children, texts, self, teaching and the world. "For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that." (Jardine, 1994, p. 19) This inquiry is about bringing into relation and acknowledging the relationships between books, children, self, and the world. It is an inquiry into kinship dwelling within the topic of reading. It explores familiarity -- the family of experience we share with others in the world. This inquiry acknowledges that the topic of reading is generous and generative, generous and generative enough to house all our stories of reading while it remains the topic of

inquiry. It seeks to open up the possibilities of understanding reading, to engage and address others, to further the event of understanding.

The eventfulness of responsive reading continuously reoccurs. Each time a book enters my hands the promise of response hovers in the surrounding energy where text and audience meet. The promise of responses that are interpretations, that are interruptions demanding attention. Responsive reading events that house the promise of a clearing of space where interpretation and interpreters can begin to work together. Eventful readings leading to work that calls forth conversations, meetings with others, rememberings of experience, and that shapes experiences to come. The eventfulness of reading continually invites and compels me on a journey of understanding, a journey of understanding of self, others, and the world.

The journey of this thesis ventures along a path that invited and called forth a space where the work of interpretation could begin. A path that led to a field of study that is sensitive to experience and maintaining integrity while interpreting lived experience, in the world, to deeply understand our lives. A field of study demanding acknowledgment that our experience is an experience of *something*, a field of study that provided a language in which to articulate my understandings and which promoted the opportunity to converse with and about the phenomenon of responsive readings. In this field of study I encountered a language full of possibilities and generativity. I was invited to a place where the possibilities of the

topic of reading could be worked out, where stories became not just my stories but the furthering of the story of reading. I encountered a place, which was an opening up of the horizon of possibilities around the topic of reading. I encountered a pathway along the journey that led to the field of hermeneutics.

CHAPTER TWO

WE PROCEED

Hermeneutics

I first encountered hermeneutics in the context of a university course on reader theory. I encountered hermeneutics within the context of understanding textual interpretation and conversation, in understanding reading. Hermeneutics is not a theory of reading but it is concerned with textual interpretations.

Hermeneutics is concerned with what happens to us when we read over and above our wanting and willing. It is concerned with the substantive happenings of reading, the images' reading invokes and the journeys of reading along which we venture. Hermeneutics is concerned with what plays out in our readings, experiences and understandings. As a theory of human understanding hermeneutics provides us with images of the way understanding works in the world. It provides us with a view of understanding of the circumstances and comportment of interpretation that have implications for reading. Hermeneutics connects reading, understanding and truth.

Hermeneutics has a long history extending back to the times of Aristotle and ancient Alexandria. The Reformation of the sixteenth century saw the rise of theological hermeneutics. Biblical hermeneutics is concerned with where the

authority for the meaning of a given text, sacred texts, resides. Whether it is within a traditional interpretive community or within the text itself. The development of a hermeneutics concerned with the problem of method arose during the eighteenth century. The questions of method were not just for interpretation of texts but also for the emerging understanding of science.

The point is that eighteenth century philosophers were full of optimism that life in general could be systematically brought under the control of correct logical procedure. It is *that* assumption, of truth being ultimately a methodological affair, that much of contemporary hermeneutics wishes to challenge. (Smith, 1991, p. 189)

Romantic hermeneutics marked the nineteenth century including thinkers such as Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Schleiermacher contributed to the hermeneutic understanding of interpretation.

Good interpretation involves a playing back and forth between the specific and the general, the micro and the macro. When this interplay is applied to the understanding of persons, one is inevitably drawn into a consideration of how language both encourages and constrains a person's self-understanding. (Smith, 1991, p. 190)

Dilthey began to explore the methodological concept of understanding as having its origin in the process of life. This exploration was influenced by the investigations of phenomenology.

Philosophical hermeneutics has a phenomenological heritage. Edmund Husserl's notion of the life-world, the way the world exists, the way the world *is*, prior to our actions and thoughts, is part of the phenomenological heritage.

Hermeneutics retains from phenomenology an understanding of intentionality.

Intentionality refers not to what our intentions are, not to what we plan to do, but to what we tend, to the topic of our experiences. Experiences are experiences of *something*, thinking is thinking about *something*, interpretations are interpretations of *something*, which are always and everywhere housed in the world. We begin in the midst of the world.

The hermeneutics I am undertaking in this thesis began in a place of passion, the place of reading. Reading introduced me to hermeneutics, primarily the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans–Georg Gadamer (Gadamer, 1989; Risser, 1997; Weinsheimer, 1985). It is in Gadamer’s hermeneutics that I find a language and a place with which to dwell with my topic. A language and place that helps me to understand my relationships with the work and the world. A language and place that gives me a way to talk about my understandings and experiences, a way to communicate with and about them. Gadamer’s writing informs, shapes and furthers my understandings of self, topic, and our relations with the world.

Hermeneutics is a theory of human understanding. It is a theory, which posits that understanding is the element within which we operate; understanding is our openness to the world and our closure. Understanding operates in orienting self in the world; it is housed in what is at play in the world and in the willingness to lose oneself as one enters that play. Hermeneutics understands that things that

play in the world also play us; we play and are played beyond our wanting and willing. Our understandings are not ours alone; they exist and belong to the world. Our understandings are played at, played with, and played out in the world. The play of our understandings is the performance of the topic, its history of performance and its open invitation for players. Hermeneutics wants to explore the understandings and meanings made possible by the instance of the play.

Hermeneutics is concerned with the way we read our world, our openness to the possibilities made possible by experience.

The way we experience one another, the way we experience historical traditions, the way we experience the natural givenness of our existence and of our world, constitute a truly hermeneutical universe, in which we are not imprisoned, as if behind insurmountable barriers, but to which we are opened. (Gadamer, 1989, p. xxiv)

Hermeneutics is a practice of understanding, a way of interpreting our world and our existence as it is lived out in this world. Hermeneutics charges us with understanding our topic, selves, and with the living of our lives well within those understandings.

Hermeneutic Address and Understanding

Hermeneutics begins with being struck by something, being called, captivated and claimed by something. Hermeneutics begins with something

asserting itself from within a world that already has a life, a life of which we can only be partially aware. "Understanding begins... when something addresses us" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 299) The address occurs in the presence of something; an entangled, eventful encounter with something.

It (interpretive research) begins (and remains) with the evocative, living familiarity that this tale evokes. The task of interpretation is to bring out this evocative given in all its tangled ambiguity, to follow its evocations and the entrails of sense and significance that are wound up with it. (Jardine, 1992, p. 55)

In being addressed by the instance, we are called to venture on a journey. We are called to venture on a journey full of adventure.

An adventure, however, interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context which it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 69)

The journey and adventure is undergone "like a test or trial from which one emerges enriched and more mature." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 69)

In hermeneutics the address of the event is the opening of something, something moves in the living stream of life, something stands out in the midst of the world. The event takes place in the world and it is of the world. Its opening is the opening up of a topic. It's calling and its claim is for exploration and cultivation. In its instance it is 'fecund' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 38) It has a "generative

and re-enlivening effect on the interweaving texts and textures of human life in which we are all embedded.” (Jardine, 1992, p. 51) Hermeneutics acknowledges that we are all embedded within this world. We understand because we are in relationship with the topic in the world. “Meaning sprouts in the very depths of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation.” (Abram, 1996, p. 75) The journey of inquiry has already begun prior to our discovery, prior to the arrival of our questions. Understanding means understanding where the event came from, how it asserted itself, and to whom we owe its arrival. We live in the same tradition as that which we are trying to understand. We understand because we live in a nest of relations with our topic, an interweaving nest of which we are only partly aware. “Someone who understands is always already drawn into an event through which meaning asserts itself.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 490) We are not impartial observers but active players and partners.

Hermeneutics remembers that the researcher is a perceiving and perceived individual. The researcher is a player in and of the play. The connections between understanding and understanding self are open. Hermeneutics does not try to remove the researcher from the play - - a move into a subject reporting on an isolated object. It does not see the researcher as a contaminant or despoiler but understands that who the researcher is, what she experiences and who she becomes has a living connection with the topic.

When we know something truly and well, that which we know does not feel like a separate object to be manipulated and mastered. Instead, we feel inwardly related to it; knowing it means that we have somehow entered into its life, and it into ours. (Palmer, 1993, p. 57)

The researcher comes to the research, and understanding, through the address of the claim- - filled with questions, thoughts, wonderings, concerns, angst and passion. The research is based on what called them forth in their experience - - a conversation, a classroom incident, a haunting series of events. The particularities of the researcher's position within the tradition are necessary for understanding. "Listening to a tradition when it speaks to us and addresses us in the language of interpretation is already belonging to it." (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 251) It is from within the tradition that the researcher is called. This calling and claim is the opening through which the researcher hears and begins to question the topic. It is what allows the topic to reveal itself, it is the portal through which the researcher engages with the topic, and through which we add understanding to our lives.

We live in the same tradition as that which we endeavor to understand. "Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a bond to the subject matter". (Gadamer, 1989, p. 295) In living within the midst of the tradition that which we already understand, our judgments, opinions, foreknowledge, our prejudices are parts of our understanding. They are pre-conditions to our understanding. Our prejudices cannot be eliminated in the

application of method but are to be engaged in the process of coming to understand. “The fact that the knower’s own being comes into play certainly betrays the limitation of objectivity and method, but it does not prevent truth.” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 259) We engage our pre-judgments, foreknowledge and prejudices not for confirmation but in the service of understanding. Understanding which means understanding something differently, understanding something new or re-newed. “We understand differently if we understand at all, for unless there is some difference to be integrated, some gap to be bridged, the interpreter will have nothing to say and no interpretation will be possible.” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 254)

As hermeneutics works against the manipulation of the topic into an object so too does it work against the collapse of the work into subjectivity. “What the interpretation is hence-forth *about* is not me and my past experiences, but that *of which* I have had certain experiences.” (Jardine, 1992, p. 58) Our interpretations do not arise independently, they arise through connections and experiences of the world. Our interpretations are interpretations of *something*. “The players are not the subjects of play; instead play merely reaches presentation (*Darstellung*) through the players.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 103) The understandings we work through, we work through in the world with others. The shared understanding we have of the world prevents the player from being the subject of the play. It prevents players from ‘acting’. We see not the technique of presentation but the play itself. We

understand, we play, from within our particularities of a tradition but it is a tradition that we share. Our particularities are threads in the web; they belong to and support the whole. Interpreting our experiences takes place in an interrelated, multivocal, interweaving nest of relations. If my experiences and understandings are *just my opinion*, and if your experiences and understandings are *just your opinion*, then at most we can debate; we cannot sustain a conversation. We allow the possibility of truly meeting one another to collapse. We are no longer players and what the world has to say to us remains silent.

What the world has to say to us is important. Our interpretations are sustained in the world. The work of interpretation exists in the world. Meeting others around the work takes place in the world. Our topic is housed in the world and our stories are housed in the topic. Our stories are told for what they illuminate, generate, and cultivate about the topic. The stories told in this research are shared for what they tell and retell about the topic of reading. These stories are about reading and of reading but also belong to reading for reading is their source and also their limit. (Jardine, 1994, p. 125) Each story is related to and interwoven with the others in the larger web of understanding. Each story can be read into another, “so you never have the whole story and you can never be done with any piece of the story, because it always needs re-reading into the ongoing generosity of things.” (Jardine, 1994, p. xxxi)

Hermeneutic Experience and Understanding

Gadamer (1989) refers to an experience as something, which in being experienced has lasting importance through its special impression.

Everything that is experienced is experienced by oneself, and part of its meaning is that it belongs to the unity of this self and thus contains an unmistakable and irreplaceable relation to the whole of this one life. Thus, essential to an experience is that it cannot be exhausted in what can be said of it or grasped as its meaning. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 67)

The whole of this life is always evolving, never fully given; it is an emerging whole. Accordingly what is grasped as the experience's meaning is also emerging and evolving. Throughout our lives experiences have a character of excursion and return. At times they will remain vividly present, at others they will hover ghostly in the shadows of our memory. The experience flows and ebbs within remembering. It loses and gains, it ages, and can never be remembered the same again. An experience constitutes itself in memory because in being experienced it makes a special impression of lasting importance. Its significance is not soon forgotten and it calls for time to determine meanings. The meaningfulness of the experience is not rendered complete by what it initially meant, but "accompanies one through life, determining that life and being determined by it." (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 88) The experience cannot be exhausted through saying or grasping because it is yet to be fully given.

Understanding is partial, it emerges from the event situated within the tradition and it carries the tradition forward. We understand some of the threads within the web, we cannot see and understand the web in its entirety. The understandings we generate at this particular point in time are not fixed and constant. They are not final. "Understanding is foremost an act of repetition where interpretations, which always remain a limited instance of understanding, are continually placed back into the process of understanding." (Risser, 1997, p. 4)

The next instance we come upon will have something to teach us. It will have something to teach us about what the tradition has meant all along. In teaching us it is re-generative and transformative. The next instance has something to say about what our prior understandings were, it changes what we thought we understood the tradition to mean and what we will consider the instance to mean. What we have understood the tradition to be, the way we have lived with and in the tradition, is transformed by the arrival of the next instance. "New sources of understanding are continually emerging that reveal unsuspected elements of meaning." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 298)

Understanding is limited, new and consistently re-newed. We are always on a journey towards and with understanding, a journey that never has a final point of arrival. The journey of understanding will be and is full of curves, hills, valleys, rainbows, and pathways. The various topographies along the journey are the openings and possibilities for understanding.

These openings are a result of hap. (Weinsheimer, 1985) Hap - when one happens onto something, or something happens to one and it clears a space for understanding. Spaces in which to dwell with the topic, to cultivate, explore, to take care of the instance and its interrelatedness. Along the journey of this life we happen upon events and events happen upon us. Being called, claimed, and addressed by the instance happens. “(H)ap points the way home - or rather, is already there. When we happen upon something true, something that possesses an immediate certitude, then we already belong to and participate in the *Geschehen der Wahrheit*, the happening of truth.” (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 15) In already being home, dwelling within familiarity, with your kin we belong to truth. Thus hap is also an opening that allows truth - - an opening for *aletheia*.

Truth, *aletheia*, is an important notion in hermeneutics. Hermeneutic truth is an opening. However, in its opening it recognizes its closure. *Aletheia* owns up to its shadow, it understands that to open something is to close something that was previously open. *Aletheia* is truth that admits to its own temporality. It admits to beginning in the midst of the story. It begins one part of the story, which echoes the threads of the whole story. *Aletheia* is the “attendant disclosure” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 481) of the instance within the tradition. It is generative and enlivening and calls us out of our selves, it is not personal but is about the claim of the topic.

Heidegger argued, in *Being and Time*, that truth in the sense of “correctness”, the truth, namely of the correspondence theory, phenomenologically *presupposes* another sense of truth: *aletheia*, unconcealment. Before it can be a question of correctness, something must be, must appear, must disclose itself, must sound forth. But this unconcealment of beings can happen only when, and only where, there is a hermeneutical opening, a clearing silence, a field of tonality laid out for disclosure. This essentially prior event of openness and clearing, of ontological difference, is the primordial moment of truth, the hermeneutical *aletheia* without which there can be no experience of truth in the sense of “correctness” or “correspondence”. (Levin, 1989, pp. 244-245)

Like memory and experience, *aletheia* has the character of excursion and return, loss and gain, revealment and concealment. By turning our attention towards this event we turn away from others. By attending to this event we neglect others. Being open to the possibilities of this instance we become closed to others. We can not be omnipotent, seeing everything, understanding everything. As this understanding of the event of reading is revealed concealment also takes place. Revealment and concealment are linked in *aletheia*. Experiencing truth in its entirety is an impossibility.

However comprehensive the work that consciousness has already completed, there remains something for it to do. Since concealment belongs to revelation, one might say that revelation constantly increases its own task. Absolute knowledge thus becomes impossible. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 39)

The possibilities of aletheia force us to make difficult decisions. By emphasizing and attending to the particularities of this event we suppress and shadow others. “But this is precisely the activity that we call interpretation.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 386) The boundary between concealment and revealment, the old and the new is the place of hermeneutics. Understanding takes place in the movement between excursion and return, between loss and gain, between the young and the old. Hermeneutic understanding is in the journey that ventures forth and returns, the journey that seeks a home.

In this structure of excursion and return we discern the circular structure of hermeneutic understanding. Already we can see why it is not a vicious circle in which the mind just spins its wheels. The spirit consists in movement – first in its departure from its home into the strange and unfamiliar, the otherwise. If the move is complete, the spirit finds a home, makes itself at home in the other, so that its new home is no longer alien. But at this point, the elsewhere that had once seemed so foreign proves not only to be a new home but its real home; we discover that the movement which before had seemed to be an exile was in fact a homecoming, and what had seemed to be home when we set out was in fact merely a way station. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 70)

Language and Understanding

Interpretation occurs through language. As Gadamer (1989) states in Truth and Method “*language is the universal medium in which understanding occurs. Understanding is interpretation.*” (p. 389) In interpreting we seek the words for

our understanding. Language links thinking and understanding. It is through language that we find our thoughts, that our understandings emerge and begin to take form, and through which we converse with others. Our understandings are constituted and situated linguistically. "Interpretation is the linguistic expression of understanding. But understanding is the understanding of things, and thus interpretation, is best conceived as the process by which mind and world are unified in language." (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 220)

Language is a performance, an event, it is understanding. "The weight of things we encounter in understanding plays itself out in a linguistic event, a play of words playing around and about what is meant." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 490) The playing of our understandings is in language. Language itself stores our understandings. "In language – in living language (i.e., in the language of conversation, the language of speaking to one another) – *is* the experience of the world." (Risser, 1997, p. 11)

The interpretive task is to open and carry on a conversation. It is to cultivate truth in the play of conversation. Cultivating truth between participants.

Truth is between us, in relationship, to be found in the dialogue of knowers and knowns who are understood as independent but accountable selves. This dialogue saves personal truth from subjectivism, for genuine dialogue is possible only as I acknowledge an integrity in the other that cannot be reduced to my perceptions and needs." (Palmer, 1993, pp. 55-56)

Conversation and Understanding

To participate in a conversation is to participate in the event of understanding, to participate in the arrival of understanding. There is an element of self-forgetfulness when engaged in dialogue. When engaged in conversation one gives oneself over to the dialogue, allowing the conversation to lead along its path. The conversation conducts itself through its participants. In conversation we participate in something greater than ourselves, we participate in possibilities. In conversation the tradition we are trying to understand is investigated, furthered, and produced. Conversation allows for consideration, reflection, openness and possibilities. It allows for the truth the topic may speak.

Conversation takes place in the presence of others. It occurs in the play between participants, in the movement to and fro, in the dialectical relationship of question and answer. We enter into conversation seeking understanding. We put our pre-judgments, foreknowledge, and prejudices into play not for obstinate confirmation of our own views but to listen for the possibilities of truth the other may speak. Truth happens when we do not stand over or against a conversation but when we participate in the movement of the conversation.

The events of reading I have engaged in are events of conversation. They are events of conversations with texts, children, self, and others. Some conversations have emerged unsuspected and spontaneous. Such as the

conversation initiated by the eventfulness of a story, a reading that bridged my own journey into the world of reading. Some conversations were initiated by a text, a bedtime story brought home from the school library, which called forth questions of ethical concerns regarding conservation of nature. Some conversations were sought out, continuations of calls texts had made to me, calls I wanted to explore with children. Conversations in which I sought to participate, striving to further my own understandings.

The eventfulness of conversations continues in my reading and writing. As I engage in these activities I ask questions and am questioned. As I read about theories of reading and response, teaching practices of reading and response and hermeneutics the conversations initiated contribute to one another, they contribute to understanding. Conversation continues in my writing. As I write I am finding out. I read and re-read my writing as it aids in forming my thoughts and understandings. Writing is not just a way to represent my understandings it also informs my understandings. Writing draws me into the conversation of understanding. I read my writing and the writing of others for the truths that may be opened, taken up, read with others, journeyed with and conversed with.

Understanding is always a form of dialogue, a coming to agreement within a structure of openness. And again, conversation is not a talking about something that is already there, but has the structure of an event, a present enactment, which remains unfinished. Any text is a structure that can be taken as a new event, written things must

begin to speak again. Every reading that attempts to understand is only a first step and never comes to an end; we need the continuing effort to find the common ground. This is what the vigilance of the conversation that we are enacts. (Risser, 1997, pp. 171-172)

Each conversation is a thread in the web of understanding. Each conversation is multivocal, is plural, not singular in its truths. Each conversation can be read into the generosity of the web. Each conversation supports and reflects the others. They are kin, related to one another, and interwoven with one another. Each participant whether text, reading event, self, or other, becomes strengthened through conversation. The threads of conversation are sticky, fine, strong, interconnected and multiple. Together they build and support the web of understanding.

The Children

Children's voices resonate throughout this research. Resonating voices of children I have taught, of my own children and childhood, and of those with whom I sought to share reading events and conversations. Their voices resonate with wonderings, thoughts and understandings that emerged along side my own. We journeyed through the storied world of reading and response together, companions and participants in the eventfulness of being called by texts.

The children's voices, the voices of those I have taught, are grade two students. They are mostly seven years old and we were brought together by happenstance. They happened to be the children whose names were on my class list for that year. In the course of our creating a classroom community we shared stories on a daily basis and engaged in conversations sparked by the texts shared. We shared stories and conversations both as a whole class and in small groups during our language arts programming time. What was part of our daily living together became events, through university course work and assignments, to investigate more fully. The group of grade two children whose story journey is shared compelled me, drew me, instigated the process of inquiry. These children were not my research subjects but my companions on the journey of grade two. My relationship with them was pedagogical. My role as their teacher was a critical role. While the context of the classroom provided the attendant conditions for investigations into reading, reader response, and reader responsibility it was not an intentional research structure. I wanted to investigate my understandings of reading and response, to learn to live with them well and to further my understandings of how to teach these children well.

Other children whose voices resonate within this inquiry are my own children. In the process of living well together, of taking care of each other I want to give them the gift of reading. I want to give them the gift of responsive and

responsible readings. I endeavor to pass on the inheritance of reading. To allow reading to take root, to nourish it so that it may grow and blossom. To promote, build and provide bridges for my children, and others, to cross over into storied worlds. I want to invite them into worlds of magic, mysterious worlds, worlds of others, worlds where they can play with and out their understandings.

At the time of the stories shared in this work the boys were six and four. Richard was in grade one and Alexander in his second year of preschool. Richard was able to independently read a variety of texts and enjoyed reading aloud to Alexander, his unborn baby sister and myself. While often choosing to read aloud to others Richard also particularly enjoyed being read to. Often our bedtime story ritual was a mixture of reading voices. Reading responsibilities were shared among us all. Alexander interacted with stories, enjoying the pictures, reading from memory, and creating stories based upon the illustrations. He would often provide the sound effects for stories. He embodied whirling winds, sirens, animal sounds; any and all sounds he thought added to the effect of the story. Alexander enlivened our reading times with his enthusiasm for stories. Throughout our shared reading experiences the role of reader was flexible. Surrounded by books – favorite books, familiar books, new and old books, our own books, school and public library books we would transport ourselves to storied worlds. Reading was interactive. We engaged with text, conversations, and each other.

Our bedtime story rituals were and still are part of our lives. Again what was and is part of our daily existence became, through university course work and assignments, something to investigate more fully. What was and is embedded in the work and life of parenting compelled me to examine the nature of responsive readings and responsible readers.

Voices also resonate, through this text, of those whom I sought to participate with in shared reading events. Reading events that I hoped would encourage, prompt, and cultivate conversations. Conversations, which would in turn encourage, prompt and cultivate understandings about responsive and responsible readings.

At the time of this inquiry the four children, two boys and two girls, with whom I participated in shared reading events were all six years of age and attending grade one. Emma and Max were together in one classroom while Shae and Richard were together in another. I extended the invitation for their participation knowing that they are all confident, articulate, and cooperative children. I was not a stranger to these children and their families for they were and are my son Richard's peer group. At each of our reading sessions they were eager and willing to participate and our shared history contributed to the informal and relaxed nature of our conversations.

Through happenstance and conscious decisions, through embedded experience and through judgements I encountered and I sought witnesses. I engaged with witnesses who could share in the eventfulness of reading and response conversations, witnesses who could teach me. Witnesses who could read back to me a more generous and generative version of understanding responsive reading. Witnesses who are children for “when the young retell the tale the old can learn, but neither about the young or about the old but about where they might dwell together, this place” (Jardine, 1994, p. 180), the place of reading.

The Texts

Texts exist to be performed, to be read, and to be conversed with. Texts witness us, lay claim to us, and make us their own. Like a silent partner they speak through and with us. They entice us, invite us, bid us ‘well come’ and interpretation is our response to their call. In the to and fro movement, in the play between interpreter and text interpretations are projected, retracted, and emended. As the reader enters into conversation with the text, questioning, expecting and seeking answers so also does the text ask questions of the reader. The readers’ openness to the possibilities of the text is their openness to interpretation. Interpretation, response, takes place in the movement, the to and fro, the play of conversation.

Texts are in fact helplessly vulnerable to imposition; and unless the interpreter holds himself open to what the text says, there will be no dialogue, but only monologue. Yet it remains true that, in translation and interpretation generally, the interpreter must speak for the text. Its openness to imposition is a necessary consequence of its need for and openness to interpretation, and the interpreter who would fulfill his task cannot do otherwise than involve himself in the meaning of the text by speaking for it. (Weinsheimer, 1985, p. 221)

Texts are open to and need response. They make themselves understood through interpretation, through response. Texts are free to engage in new relationships and addresses, for to the readers what is written appears to be addressed directly to themselves. "The reader experiences what is addressed to him and what he understands in all its validity. What he understands is always more than an unfamiliar opinion: it is always possible truth." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 394)

Being addressed by the possibilities of the text, having the text address the readers, being called to interpretation, to voice response were my hopes for the participants of the shared reading experiences. Acknowledging that texts can address readers as well as remain silent or be silencing I sought to engage in readings where the text enticed us, prompted us, encouraged us and demanded of us a conversation. I sought to bring students into conversation with the voices of the text and interpretation. I endeavored to engage in events of readings where to fulfill the task of reader meant participating in interpretive conversations. Events

of readings “which make the hairs on the neck, the non-existent pelt, stand on end and tremble, when every word burns and shines hard and clear and infinite and exact, like stones of fire, like points of stars in the dark.” (Byatt, 1990, p. 471)

As the children’s voices resonate through this inquiry so also do voices of texts. Texts that I met through and with children, texts that were invitations extended by respected colleagues, texts I stumbled upon, and texts that are old and dear friends. Voices of texts that enticed us, and engaged with us. Voices of texts that invited and sustained thoughtful conversations. Texts that sustained multiple conversations, that are generous and generative, that are able to support multifarious voices. Texts whose words were a calling, uttering them was an evocation, an evocation of interpretation.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes

A close friend and respected colleague introduced me to Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes. In my quest to understand reading and response and to understand how to live well with the students I was teaching I sought literature that would invite interpretation and open possibilities. A crucial part of that journey was conversations with friends and colleagues, conversations about and between texts. It was in the course of conversation that Sadako and the Thousand

Paper Cranes and I first met. And it is in conversation that our relationship continues, conversations with self, text and others.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes, by Eleanor Coerr, is a story that invites, encourages, and charges us with interpretive conversation. It is the compelling story of Sadako, a young Japanese girl, who was only twelve years old when she died. She was two years old when the atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima in an attempt to end World War II. Ten years later she died of leukemia as a result of radiation from the atom bomb.

Tiger

Richard introduced this story to me. A story whose first fateful meetings I remember clearly. My son Richard brought home the book Tiger, by Judy Allen, from his school library. He found the book on the shelf and thought it might be interesting because he is fascinated with animals. He was expecting a text that would impart information about tigers, a text that would be non-fiction, which would be predominantly biological. As we settled in to read Tiger for a bedtime story we were invited to a world not of factual renditions about the biology of tigers but to a village where rumors of a tiger living in the forest are spreading.

No one in the village is sure who has started the rumors but they say that a tiger is living in the forest. The villagers decide that they should hunt the tiger.

The only villager resistant to killing the tiger is a young boy named Lee. When a famous hunter arrives to shoot the tiger the villagers wish him good hunting except for Lee who wishes the hunter bad luck. As the story continues readers learn that the hunter's way of shooting animals is not what was originally anticipated. Tiger is a dramatic story, which invites the reader into exploring a world of ecological concerns.

Frederick

Frederick is an old friend. We have been friends for so long that I can not remember when we first met. I know our relationship goes at least as far back as my first year in University. It is a book that I engage with consistently in my teaching and has become a favorite of my own children.

Frederick by Leo Lionni, is a captivating story of a family of field mice who live in an old stone wall. All of the field mice work hard at gathering and storing food supplies for the upcoming winter. All except Frederick. The family questions Frederick about his lack of productivity and he explains that his work is of a different nature. As the winter settles in the mice learn that Frederick's supplies sustain them in a different way. Frederick is a story that sings a song of praise to poetry and poets and invites us to recognize and appreciate gifts of language.

Literature as Invitation

Along my journey of teaching, of parenting, of reading I have sought to live well with books reading books generously and generatively. I try to be open to and share the truths in literature, and to invite others into a space where we may dwell in and with literature. I endeavor to savor the invitation extended by literature. An invitation I seek to extend to others. In savoring and sharing the invitation extended by literature we are invited to turn and return to literature again and again. Turning and returning to dwell in a space where understanding can be worked out and can be played out, in conversation with others.

In seeking to understand the call of literature I turn and return to an experience from my own childhood, an experience that resonates throughout my journey of reading and teaching. “The process of thought begins with something coming into our mind from our memory. But even this is an emanation, for the memory is not plundered and does not lose anything.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 425)

CHAPTER THREE

RECEIVING THE GIFT

In seeking to understand the nature of readings that invite response, of readings that invite the interpretive occasion, I remember a significant childhood event. The memory of this childhood event is an emanation, a beginning, a source of my relationship with literature and with reading. When a story enters my hands and together with children we begin to journey the memory of this event shapes and impacts the pathways our journey follows. This event is central in my own history as a reader, an experience that shaped myself as a reader, parent and teacher. I share the memory of an event that is scored in who I am and, through its presence, who I am becoming.

I remember the first story that touched me and made me want desperately to be able to access its world without the mediation of another, a story my mother began reading to me, enacting the role of a bridge to that storied world. I remember the intensity surrounding our readings of the story, intensity that made me want to touch, hold, make the book mine, to engage primarily with the text, intensity that made me want to be ‘the reader’. I remember the feel of the flannel nightgown wrapping around my legs, the warmth of my mother as she nestled beside me to read. I can hear the echo of her voice as she transported me to another world, a

world where another little girl was so like me and yet so different, a world where I was able to both become and observe, a world that left me breathless with anticipation. A world that I wanted to take myself to, to be able to travel through and with the story without waiting for bedtime, or for when my mother had time to read to me. Soon I began to echo my mother's voice, re-reading her readings. And in these re-readings was the power of reading, a way to cross the bridge into the storied world. And so it was through and with this particular text that I became able to access the worlds of stories and books without the presence of another mediating reader. I became able to be independent when encountering and living with texts. My constant companion-- the memory of this experience - - has profoundly shaped who I am as a reader, a parent and as a teacher of young children, and who I am becoming as I engage in these activities.

Becoming a Reader

The book lies on my shelf, the first in the series. The first in the series of stories written by the author tracing a journey of self and family and the first in the series tracing my journey as a reader. Its cover protects and encloses the pages of the story and upon opening uncovers a world of journeys. "Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs." (Wilder, 1932, p. 1) With this sentence begins the journey with and

through the text. It beckons to me and invites me to revisit a 'once upon a time' of my own.

Once upon a time there was a little girl who was seven years old. This little girl loved to talk and play with her friends and her report cards consistently commented upon her ' chattiness'. During reading times in school she would take out her Mr. Mugs reader and turn the pages along with the rest of her reading group. She knew that many others in her class could read 'all by themselves' and that these children got to read different books than hers. She knew that hers was a group of slower readers, of children who always had to read with the teacher, or else they would only look at the pictures and talk about things other than the book. This was not of great concern to the little girl for Mr. Mugs was simply a silly dog and there didn't seem much point in reading stories about a dog. There didn't seem to be much point in the activity of reading itself. There was nothing magical, wondrous, or interesting in the books she was allowed to read at school. Nothing enticed the little girl to want to learn to read. If her choices were Mr. Mugs or not reading she chose not to read. At school the little girl continued to work in her Mr. Mugs book and to do the right pages in her workbook, and she continued to love to talk and laugh with her friends.

At home the little girl's mother would read different stories to her. She would read her nursery rhymes, fairy tales and other stories. Books were special

‘treats’, special gifts and the little girl loved story time with her mom. She loved to listen to her mother’s voice read out the story, to talk with her mom about the worlds between the covers of books. She took particular joy in listening to her mother read the nursery rhyme Taffy was a Welshman for her grandfather came from Wales and it was humorous to consider him as Taffy.

*Taffy was a Welshman,
Taffy was a thief,
Taffy came to my house and stole a hunk of beef.
I went to Taffy’s house. Taffy was in bed.
I picked up hammer and hit him on the head.*

Reading at home was an enjoyable, joyful, interactive time filled with laughter, magic and conversation. Still, the little girl was content to let her mother voice the text, to let her mother be the ‘reader’.

One night the little girl’s mother brought out a new book to read- a book she had just bought thinking that the little girl might like this story for she knew her daughter liked people stories and this was the story of a little girl. “Once upon a time, sixty years ago, a little girl lived in the Big Woods of Wisconsin, in a little gray house made of logs.” (Wilder, 1932, p. 1) And so the little girl’s mother began to read, and in this reading there was something for the little girl. The story captured and captivated the little girl. It began to make her its own, it welcomed her and enticed her to stay. The little girl nestled closer to her mother, leaning in to see the words and the pictures, the world this book offered. The storied world

beckoned to her, called her and invited her in. The flannel nightgown her grandmother had made was soft against her skin, rubbing her feet against one another she became still and the world became wondrous. She could picture that log house surrounded by nothing but woods where “There were no houses. There were no roads. There were no people. There were only trees and the wild animals who had their homes among them.” (Wilder, 1932, pp. 1-2) She felt herself there. She was welcomed in this place. She belonged. Here was a story that invited her into its world, a world of little girls and families and the way things were in that ‘once upon a time’.

In reading Little House in the Big Woods the little girl happened to journey to a ‘secondary world’ (Tolkein, 1964). A world where “the story-maker proved a successful ‘sub-creator’... making a Secondary World which your mind can enter. Inside it, what he relates is ‘true’: it accords with the laws of that world. You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside.” (Tolkein, 1964, pp. 36-37) Inside that secondary world the little girl was able to journey with Laura. She was not an impartial outside observer, but a shadowy family member. She belonged.

Nightly, the little girl’s mother continued to read to her and the little girl’s fascination and wonderment with this world, a storied world, continued to grow. Each night she would nestle in as close as she could, listen to her mother’s voice and follow along both the words and the world in the book. Soon she began to be

eager to take herself to this storied world where she had a belonging place. She did not want to have to wait until her mother could read to her, did not want to wait until bedtime for bedtime was too short and the story always stopped too soon. The little girl began to pick up the book after school and ‘reread’ what her mother had read before her, echoing her mother’s voice. She began to re-read practicing the sound of the language, the rhythms of the story, taking herself back to that special world. In re-reading the story flowed and ebbed, she was able to re-connect with the storied world. She was able to re-visit, and although familiar, in echoing her mother’s voice she encountered something new. She encountered a familiar friend with whom she could engage anew.

Soon, during bedtime story, the little girl was reading with her mother, stepping in and reading those words she knew. “Laura, Mary, Carrie” and “Ma and Pa” who were also “Caroline and Charles” these words became familiar and began to link the story to the words on the page. They were important words to the little girl and important words to the story. The times the little girl stepped in and read soon became more and more frequent. She began to be able to read more, to be able to read sections of the book. As the journey through the story continued so also did the little girl’s attempts to read the text. The journey through and with the story had also become a journey of reading.

Along the journey there were times where the little girl found she could read some of the story herself, and gradually there came a time when the little girl's mother was mostly listening and the little girl was doing most of the reading. As she continued to read her mother was there beside her supporting the little girl's attempts to give voice to the text. She knew her mother was there encouraging her and she need only ask when she came to something she didn't understand, or something she was unable to 'read'. Her mother welcomed her questions, her "listen to this", her comments and her conversations. The little girl's mother's presence invited, supported, and encouraged her journey with the story and her journey of reading. She had gently nudged and guided the little girl, had made the world of reading an invitation that she could no longer resist or ignore.

The little girl became enticed by the magic of reading and was excited to be able to transport herself to the world of Laura, to share in the adventures and troubles that Laura found and that found Laura. When reading she was in another world. This world seemed suspended in time. Reading was like being in a travel machine where she could visit other worlds. The little girl became lost in Laura's world, a world of log houses, wilderness, and family, a world of journeys, adventures and home comings.

At the end of the book there was a pause in the storied journey of Laura Ingalls, but another journey was continued, for the little girl had learned to read. She could now read 'all by herself'. The little girl read:

"When the fiddle had stopped singing Laura called out softly, 'What are days of auld lang syne, Pa?' 'They are days of a long time ago, Laura.' Pa said. 'Go to sleep, now.' But Laura lay awake a little while, listening to Pa's fiddle softly playing and to the lonely sound of the wind in the Big Woods. She looked at Pa sitting on the bench by the hearth, the firelight gleaming on his brown hair and beard and glistening on the honey-brown fiddle. She looked at Ma, gently rocking and knitting. She thought to herself, 'This is now.' She was glad that the cosy house, and Pa and Ma and the firelight and the music were now. They could not be forgotten, she thought, because now is now. It can never be a long time ago." (Wilder, 1932, pp. 237-38)

And the little girl too knew that this could not be forgotten, because the journey of reading was now and would continue. This journey of reading would remain, in her thoughts and memories, as present. It would continue with other readings and other story journeys and could never be forgotten. This journey of reading had shaped and guided the kind of reader the little girl was becoming. And so the book Little House In The Big Woods by Laura Ingalls Wilder remains in its treasured space on the bookshelf, tangible evidence of a journey undertaken by a little girl.

This memory holds significance as a rite of passage, a rite initiated by loving mother, a mother who knew the power of the storied world and the possibilities it could hold for her little girl. A rite initiated by a mother who built a bridge to the world of reading and stories and invited her daughter to cross. A rite initiated by a mother who carried her little girl across the bridge when she needed carrying, who gently reassured her as the little girl began to walk, and who encouraged and helped the little girl stand on her own. A rite initiated by a mother who picked her daughter up when she fell, supported her when she stumbled, and who let go when the little girl was ready to finish the crossing on her own. In finishing the journey across this bridge the little girl was filled with a sense of wonder, mystery and excitement. She had become a reader. She could read, and being able to read opened up a world of possibilities. Reading opened up and invited the little girl to cross the story bridge and participate in many possible worlds. In the future the little girl would cross many story bridges and the fascination and need for reading would remain with her always, shaping the role she would seek to enact with her own children and the children she taught.

As my mother before me so too do I seek to provide, enact, and encourage the building of bridges between children and literature. Solid bridges that reassure and ground children so that they may safely explore storied worlds. Wobbly bridges that invite excitement, adrenaline, and adventure as children cross over the

rushing waters and immense crevices of texts. Bridges of simple logs helping children to gain their balance as they cross the story terrain. Bridges of simple ropes that provide a hand hold, an anchoring spot, a reassuring roughness within the grip. Bridges that invite intensity of experience. Bridges that encourage children to cross over to the storied world, that promote communal and independent exploration. Bridges that invite children to journey with and through texts opening up journeys into possible secondary worlds. Bridges of reading.

This gift of reading is a particular gift my mother gave to me. In helping build bridges to storied worlds she started me on a journey towards a belonging place. She was my teacher, initiating a journey and propelling me along pathways to a place where literature and I belonged together. It was in her presence that I encountered a magical, compelling, wondrous place, the place of reading. Her presence served to make the familiar strange and the strange familiar. No longer was the familiar my mother's voice giving life and breath to the text, no longer was the familiar being a vicarious reader, it had become strange. What was now familiar, was now deeply ingrained in who I was and am, was the strange ability to breathe life into text, to enter into stories, to take up the possibilities the world of reading offered. My mother invited me "to love the good by loving our own." (Lee, 1998, p. 129) With her presence and her companionship my mother invited me to 'love the good'; to love literature. Loving literature, being claimed by stories

became inseparable from who I was and am. In ‘loving the good by loving our own’ (Lee, 1998, p. 129), in loving the place of reading, I belong.

This place of reading is a special place, a desirable place, a place that dwells deeply in my heart. In being claimed by reading I am beholden to it. I am “unprovisionally claimed, beyond all bargain or convenience... beholden by the very nature of things” (Lee, 1998, p. 130), beholden by the very nature of reading. Beholden by a nature of reading that moves beyond “readings that map and dissect... that count little grey pronouns” (Byatt, 1990, p. 471), a nature of reading that moves beyond breaking the language code, beyond de-coding the text. I am beholden by a nature of reading that invites living richly with texts. A nature of reading which asks, which demands interpretation in order to fill the task of reader. I am beholden by reading that invites a journey to a belonging place.

The gift of this place of reading is the gift of a place to grow out from, to grow ahead from. Not a gift to grow apart from or up from, leaving this place behind, becoming independent from it. Not a gift of growing ahead that is a distancing, a removal, an isolation from this place of reading, this place housed in the language of memory. But a growing out from, ahead from, that is not independence of but responsibility for reading. A responsibility for ‘loving the good’, a responsibility to take care of this place of reading, to pass on its inheritance, to further its traditions. In being beholden and responsible to this

memory of reading, this place of reading I am claimed and cultivated by a nature of reading that demands the furthering of its traditions, that compels me to invite initiates into this world of reading.

Romance and Bedtime Stories

In being beholden to this place of reading, a place of reading that invites ‘loving the good’ I am bound to and captivated by this nature of reading. In being bound to this nature of reading I am also bound and held by the language that is available to house this understanding of reading. I am bound by the language that describes the eventfulness of readings that “make the hairs on the neck, the non-existent pelt, stand on end and tremble, when every word burns and shines hard and clear and infinite and exact, like stones of fire, like points of stars in the dark” (Byatt, 1990, p. 471)

In presenting to a group of peers, at the University of Calgary, the topic of this inquiry—the topic of children and responsive readings I struggled to find the language in which to share my understandings and that which I sought to explore to further those understandings. I struggled to find the language that would build a bridge of understanding, a bridge of communication between myself and the others in this course. During the presentation conversation was generated around bedtime stories. A conversation, in which one person said, “People talk as if there is

something romantic about children and bedtime stories.” I was immediately taken aback. I felt defensive. I felt that this person’s comment was belittling an understanding of reading that captivates and claims me. I was silenced. The conversation continued to swirl about me, a conversation I could no longer participate in. My presentation and participation was over. The tentative bridge had collapsed.

“People talk as if there is something romantic about children and bedtime stories.” This comment was to haunt me, hovering about demanding that something come of its instance. The incident had arisen, it pressed itself upon me and I could not ignore or avoid ‘romance and bedtime stories’. I needed not to try “...to discover the weakness of what is said, but ... to bring out its real strength.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 367) I needed to take up the instance and explore it for its truths.

Romance- excitement, love, etc. of the kind found in such literature, a love affair. Romantic- visionary. These are the words I find used in the dictionary to define romance and romantic. I think of bedtime story readings that have been filled with excitement. I think of times where I have felt my love for my children and my love for literature come together and conceive something between them. I think of my love affair with books. “People talk as if there is something romantic about children and bedtime stories.” As this statement turns itself around and

around with my memories of bedtime story readings I find they interpenetrate and inform one another. There is romance to be found in engaging with children and books. Not the romanticism of going back in time to the ‘good old days’ but romance in the excitement, the joy, the awe to be found in what children and books may become together. During readings there have been times where there is a sense of the romantic, of the visionary. Part of the romance of books, of envisioning what books and children can conceive together is inviting ‘loving the good by loving our own.’

In being compelled to pass along the inheritance of reading that invites ‘loving the good’, that invites living richly with texts, that invites journeys to possible worlds I strive to encourage, provide opportunities for and explore with my children experiences with literature. In taking responsibility for and being responsible to reading that invites ‘loving the good’ our nightly story times have a nature to them of a promise. The books we hold in our hands are a promise, our presence together is a promise. Being together with texts is a promise, a promise of experiencing being claimed by a text. I know there are no guarantees for experiencing deep responses but being together and open to the potentials of the text makes the lushness of such an experience more possible.

In our bedtime story readings there are moments that have been an enchantment, moments when we have participated in readings that have evoked

significance and insight from the text, from ourselves, and from what we have been together. Moments when I have been taken aback, moments when I have been a participant in the unfolding wisdom between text and children. There are moments when I have found joy and reverence in the power of what books and children can be together. Moments when I have found joy and reverence in the magic, wonderings, and wisdom evoked when dwelling together in this place of reading.

Family Readings: Journeys in bedtime storied worlds.

In being beholden to reading I am always and already compelled to explore reading events. Explorations that have included reading experiences with my children, Richard aged six and Alexander, aged four. Explorations through which I hoped to gain further insight into the nature of responsive readings.

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.

- T.S. Eliot *The Four Quartets*

These explorations shall not cease as I continue coming back to the same issues that haunt my thoughts; issues of young children and their reading responses and response-abilities. Issues of responsiveness in the developing reader. Issues of

children engaged in experiences with rich and provocative literature. Like a treasured friend I turn and re-turn to these explorations participating in many and varied conversations, being taught through them and by them. Through explorations of these experiences I hope to arrive at deeper understandings, deeper insights, I hope to come to know more fully this place of reading.

Reading to and with my children is a core part of our daily lives. It is part of our sustenance, part of our family tradition. Part of a tradition passing along the inheritance of the particular gift of reading handed down by my mother. Books have been and are special gifts. They have signified and reflected the growth of our family. From board books, interactive sensing books, books about starting school, homemade books, to books about the arrival of newest family members literature has been and is interrelated and interwoven in the web of our family. Literature is part of and furthers our heritage, our family traditions. We are readers. In being readers we have allegiances to other readers, a responsibility to reading and a profound responsibility to the terrain of reading.

I have always read to and with my children. I remember sitting beside Richard when he was three months old and as he played with his mobile I read aloud to him from the novel I was reading. I wanted him to hear that special cadence of voice when one reads. I wanted him to feel the story, to share with him the feeling of intimacy when reading a powerful story. I remember the quilt he was

lying on. The quilt itself a signifier of another family tradition, the tradition of quilting. I remember his expressiveness, his interaction as I read. Richard was listening to and interacting with my storied voice. This was the terrain of this reading. This terrain was a multilayered terrain, layered with traditions occasioning the passing on of a heritage.

When Richard and Alexander were learning to talk we read together- they would point and label pictures while turning pages and I would read pieces of the story, as they would allow. The book was in their hands, they were in control of when the pages were turned, and their voices were the primary ones as they explored illustrations and made connections to their blossoming understanding of language. In engaging in these experiences they were exploring the relationship between oral language and text. Their unfolding language development and the text interpenetrated and informed one another. They were the readers.

As Richard and Alexander continue to grow so does their relationship with books. They live in storied worlds where they are free to play with text and understanding. Occasionally Richard will read aloud to Alexander. His voice becomes a storied voice and they live together in shared reading experiences. In these experiences their conversation interrupts the text as each seeks to make reference to story events or connections to their own lives and understandings. They may take up the text and create a possible world dramatizing the story; a

world with knights and dragons, sharks, and hockey games. Recently, after Richard read with and to Alexander Terror Below! True Shark Stories (del Prado, 1997) our kitchen floor became the ocean and the boys characters in some of the stories. They were compelled to live out the world they had encountered in the book. Through play they were responding to text- embodying the stories by acting out the drama of shark attacks and rescues. They negotiated between themselves the stories they would embody, existing in a world to which I was not invited. They were living in a magical temporality where the confines and structures of this world were suspended. Living in a magical temporality where boys could become predators, where it was safe to explore a fascination with fear. Exploring a fascination with fear of the unknown depths of the ocean, with fear of large and powerful animals. Richard and Alexander were living in a magical temporality where they could be safely scared.

The children have often engaged in re-reading and re-telling story events. They have found texts that invite continuous conversations and explorations. Like treasured and trusted friends they have re-read and re-visited stories turning and re-turning to texts as a way of moving forward and deepening understandings (Hunsberger, 1985). At three Alexander would often pick the same book to be read frequently during the day and then again for one of his bedtime stories. We would read it to him and then most often he would read it back to us. He would echo our

readings using our voices to scaffold his own. Echoing our voices to build a bridge to the storied world. Echoing our voices to quicken the life of the text. Alexander couldn't seem to get enough of the book Look Around With Little Fish (Singer & Tuttle-Singer, 1995). It went with him on sleepovers, as important to the packing process as his blanket. He had a deep connection with that particular story. Perhaps it was the illustrations, the interaction with the little fish that squeaked when pressed, perhaps the subject, or the rhythms of the language- we do not know. But this particular story shared a connection with him. He was desirous of visiting and re-visiting its familiar terrain. Look Around With Little Fish's predictability assured, re-assured, and consistently invited Alexander to journey to the storied world. For him, it remained generous enough to house his frequent visits and generative enough to gently nudge him to explore the world of reading. In time, the book Look Around With Little Fish began to sit more frequently on the bookshelf passed over in the choosing of bedtime stories. It remains there now, often unread but not forgotten.

Alexander remains the kind of reader who has very favorite books that he loves to have read over and over again. As he grows and matures the character of his favorite books changes. However, he continues to remain enthralled by books of rhyme and rhythm. Currently, we are frequently reading Bugs That Go Bump in the Night. It has become a consistent friend in our bedtime story reading

experiences. A friend who invites another conversation, influencing our interpretations by both past and future as we already know what is to yet to come within the text. This night as I notice that once again Alexander has chosen this story I wonder and seek to explore why this particular text is one of his favorites.

Bugs That Go Bump in the Night

Bugs That Go Bump in the Night is a pop-up book about Hallowe'en whose main characters are all bugs i.e. ghostbugs and goblinbugs waiting for you in a haunted house. The illustrations are rich in detail, the story written in rhyme with the final sentence on each page hiding behind an opening. It invites reader participation through this use of 'bug-eyed' illustrations, the rhyme and rhythms of its language as well as requiring the reader to reveal the hiding places of words. The book calls for interaction with its readers. It is an entertaining and often hilarious journey to a world that plays with 'scary things.' A journey that invites the reader to become 'one of them.'

This is the haunted house bug. Enter if you dare.

Ghostbugs and Goblinbugs are waiting for you there.

Who 's that sailing through the sky?

Bugs on broomsticks flying high.

Open the coffin if you dare to see who may be sleeping there.

It's Dracubug. So do beware.

What is making that scary sound?

A Skeleton Bug is rattling around.

Mix skin and bones, a screw or two, add wings and eyes, and then some glue.

It's Frankenbug, who's looking for YOU!

Who cast a light on this dark, dark night?

A Bug-o-lantern burning bright.

Inside's a surprise made just for you.

And now YOU can look buggy, too!

- David A. Carter, 1996.

Alexander: I want to read my bug book tonight.

Me: Why is this book your favorite?

Alexander: Sometimes it's my favorite and sometimes it is not.

Me: When is it your favorite?

Alexander: It is not my favorite when I am feeling scared and it is my favorite when I don't get scared.

Me: I know that sometimes you like to be scared. Like the times when you like all your glow in the dark lizards in your room and we turn out the lights. And sometimes we like to feel safe...

Richard: Especially when we are going to bed.

I know that there are times that Alexander likes to be scared, those times he turns out all the lights in the basement takes his flashlight and goes 'monster hunting', those times he turns out his lights and watches the world of his room light up with lizards. In these instances, as in reading his 'bug book', he is enabled to be safely scared. To explore the dark terrain in a possible world layered within

his familiar world. To explore dark terrains knowing he can at any time suspend the magical temporality and return 'home'. He is invited by this book to journey to monstrous terrains where he is able to safely play, play with and play out his understandings around fear. Alexander's 'bug book' allows him to de-monstrate 'scary things.'

Alexander also responds to an understanding of timing, of timeliness. There is a sense of timeliness surrounding readings of Bugs That Go Bump in the Night. There is a time to engage in reading this story, to visit and re-visit its pathways and there is a time where to turn and re-turn to this story's journey would be to create an unsettling rupture in the fabric of this familiar world.

"It is not my favorite when I am feeling scared and it is my favorite when I don't get scared."

It would be 'bad timing' to engage in and with a journey that plays with monstrousness when scared. Richard articulates this sense of timing, a sense of 'right' timing when he tells of wanting to feel safe when going to bed. The gap between this daily world and the world of sleep and dreams is an opening, a portal. To feel unsafe when living in, when lying in this gap is to invite the monstrousness in. To feel unsafe in this portal is to create the possibility of confronting the monsters and returning home insurmountable. It invites a haunting allowing the monstrousness to enter this familiar daily world. It becomes unsafe to 'play'.

When feeling scared this text no longer invites the reader into the play opening the portal for the reader to explore, but opens the door on the other side. It suspends the safety of the familiar place— bed, and the familiar event—reading. Feeling scared is not the ‘right’ time for this reading.

Me: When you don’t get scared why is it your favorite?

Alexander: Bones.

Richard: (After a long pause) Bones! That doesn’t make any sense. You can’t say it is your favorite because “bones”.

Alexander: Yes, see (turns to the page with the skeleton) bones. There are bones and I have bones inside me.

Richard: Oh, you like it because we all have bones and that picture’s kind of like an x-ray of our bones.

Alexander: Yes, I told you bones! Now read please.

When Alexander states “bones” in response to my question there is a long pause in our conversation. There is a pause, a suspension of conversation. Like Richard I am unsure, I have fallen out of understanding, I do not understand Alexander’s connection. In the echoing silence Alexander waits expectantly. He looks to me questioningly. I can read in his expression his wonderings around the silence—are we going to read or are we going to talk some more. I look at Richard. He is perplexed. He cannot make any sense of “bones”. It is Richard who picks up the thread of our conversation and challenges Alexander on the meaningfulness of

his comment. He is unwilling to allow this thread to be unconnected to the web of understanding.

“Bones! That doesn’t make any sense. You can’t say it is your favorite because ‘bones’.”

In its instance this challenge is a reader responding to another reader who appears to be off topic. The comment “bones” seems to be unconnected to the story from Richard’s viewpoint and so he questions Alexander. In his voice is his exasperation with his younger brother. In his voice is his irritation with a younger less experienced reader. Alexander responds to Richard’s challenge and defends his position with a textual reference. He grasps the book and turns directly to the page in the story that will support his initial claim. He turns to the page with the skeleton hiding in the closet. “See...” his response to Richard has an edge, an edge of frustration at not being understood, and an edge at having to defend himself. Alexander expands upon his response, re-visiting what he has said and using the text reference as a springboard. He is making a connection between himself, the text and what he knows as a general human condition-- we all have bones. Alexander’s response of “bones” was one neither Richard nor I could understand until Alexander expanded upon his idea and referred us to the text. The work of interpretation and understanding required exploring the interwoven and interrelated threads of our conversation, the text, and response.

This experience has reaffirmed for me that as teachers and parents we need to be sensitive to exploring with children their initial responses. Often young children will make short, oral responses to texts and conversations about texts that we do not take up because they appear to be unrelated or off topic. We need to turn towards interpretation.

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

In my mind I am called to account for those times when I was not open to and did not explore the possibilities children had offered me. Those times when I did not even consider interpretation, when I did not clear the way for understanding. I remember fleetingly moments when conversations were suspended, when in the pause of time I could have, should have treated children's responses with more generosity. It is telling that I cannot remember specifics of incidents, yet I know they have occurred and I did not recognize their possibilities. I am called to account for those times when treating children's responses more generously would have been generative. Times when I needed to remember that

our understanding is increased in the presence of others. That the work of interpretation involves others and it is through the participation, the interaction, through a vital and vibrant community with others that a horizon of possibilities is opened up for us all. "Teaching thus becomes understandable as a "community of conversation" (Gadamer, 1983, p. 165) between the familiar, established world and the inevitable generativity and transformation of meaning that the entrance of the new, the young, the initiate/initial (the 'new generation') portends." (Jardine, 1994, p. 18)

Tiger

Tiger is a provocative, suspenseful, compelling and profound exploration of relationships between nature and man. In its reading it is an ecological text. "Ecology, for example, presents us with an image of our lives and the life of the Earth as involving a vast, vibrant, generative, ambiguous, multivocal, interweaving network of living interconnections." (Jardine, 1994, p. v) It is a multilayered ecological story about a tiger, a village, a young boy, and a hunter. It is a story that is a resonant, potentialized field of experience. It is a vibrant, suspenseful, emoting, reading. In its reading Tiger invites a deeply pedagogical space. A pedagogical space in which lies possibilities for transformation and learning. A space that calls for introspection, that calls for exploring many threads in the web of responsibility.

Tiger invites re-reading, deepening our understanding, encouraging further exploration and conversation, demanding that you take up some of the issues it presents. Its integrity calls forth and propels an engagement in conversation. It is a story that penetrates deep and begins to work from within. (Abrams, 1996, pp. 158-159) A story that occasions the interpretive turn.

“There is a tiger,” the villagers told each other. “Out beyond the rice fields, out beyond the swamp, somewhere in the oak woods near the river bank, there is a tiger.” No one was sure where the rumor had started, but it was a strong one, and most people believed it. They began to discuss the best, and safest, way to kill the tiger. (Allen, 1992)

The journey with the text begins here in a place of speculation and of angst. The reader is immediately confronted, taken aback by these people who plan to kill.

“But why kill it?” said Lee, who was the youngest of the children if you didn’t count the babies. (Allen, 1992)

It is Lee, one of the youngest members of the village, who voices the simplest of questions, who voices the reader’s question. Lee takes up our questions, our concerns. In asking his question Lee “opens up this “us” and thereby *becomes one of us*. And this, in turn, provides the community with a certain re-generativity and renewal.” (Jardine, 1994, p. 21) In asking his question

Lee opens up and confronts, invites us to open up and confront, highly ecological questions. Why kill the tiger? Should they kill the tiger?

Me: The villagers have been discussing the tiger and what does Lee want?

Richard: Them not to kill it.

Me: Why?

Richard: Because it is part of life, and nature is not supposed to be killed.

Me: Why do you think nature is not supposed to be killed?

Richard: Because it is part of the world.

Me: If we are part of the world and nature is part of the world...

Richard: That makes us part of nature.

Me: It does. I like how you said that. So when they are talking about killing the tiger it is about killing a part of nature which is like killing a part of us.

Richard: Like killing a piece of our heart.

In engaging and reading this text Richard finds his commitment to nature called forth. He has a deep connection and relationship with the natural world. He is fascinated by the cycles of nature and by the lives of animals. Richard consistently brings home non-fiction books about animals. His comments are telling of a deep ecological concern and insight. He recognizes that he is of this world and therefore nature is a part of himself. Richard articulates that to kill the tiger is an act of violence against nature and therefore against man. His comments are witnessing the interweaving network of interrelations in the life of the Earth. As a member of this Earthly community he has allegiances to others, responsibilities for others and a profound responsibility for the Earth. (Abram, 1996, p. 168) Richard captures his understanding and perception of loss in his statement about losing a piece of your heart. In recognizing his participation in an

animate world he poetically captures this sense of loss. He voices an understanding that the irresponsible acts of man, the act of killing the tiger, will have an impact on man himself. He articulates his understanding and knowledge that he is implicated in, that he is responsible for and to this web of life. "The sensuous world is a spontaneous, playful, and dangerous mystery in which we participate, an animate and articulate field of powers ever responsive to human actions and spoken words." (Abram, 1996, p. 153) Our actions, that which we say and do, has profound repercussions for this Earthly web.

"I don't want them to kill it," he (Lee) said. "It's probably just a story," said his mother. "It probably isn't there at all." "It is there," said Lee. "I know it is." A few days after the tiger rumor, another rumor started. The new one was about a great hunter who traveled vast distances looking for exciting prey. This was also a strong rumor. Everyone who passed it on knew someone, who knew someone else, who had heard it from a reliable witness that this hunter had never once failed.

Soon the hunter arrives at the village and many of the men offer to go with the hunter to assist him in capturing his prey. The hunter refuses their offers.

"To find the tiger," he (the hunter) said, "I need to travel quietly and alone. If I need you later, I'll send for you." "Good hunting," said the villagers—

all but one. "Bad hunting," said Lee. "I hope it gets away." The hunter stared at Lee. Lee stood straight and stared back.

Me: How does Lee know there is a tiger there?

Richard: He knows it in his heart because ... (a long pause) well it is hard to say. And Lee hopes it is bad hunting.

Me: That's when Lee tells the hunter "Bad hunting. I hope it gets away."

Richard: I want to talk about why Lee thinks its bad hunting.

Me: O.K. What is it you would like to talk about when Lee says bad hunting?

Richard: He doesn't want the tiger to get killed. Because it is like losing a part of the world, like losing a part of your heart.

Again Richard is called to articulate his understanding of the Earth as an interwoven interdependent, interpenetrating world. An understanding of a world that is both sensed and sensing. A world that is nested in relationships. He is called again to state "like losing a part of your heart". In articulating his understanding Richard shares his feelings of profound responsibility to this terrain. He knows and is known as a member of this interpenetrating Earthly community and in his knowing reweaves the bonds of this Earthly community. (Palmer, 1996)

When discussing how Lee knows of the tiger's existence Richard begins to explore an alternative way of knowing. He knows from the text that Lee has never actually seen the tiger. Its existence is described as a 'rumor' and yet when Lee's mother says that there probably really is not a tiger, that it is probably only a story, Lee states emphatically that the he knows the tiger really is there. Richard initiates a beginning understanding of knowledge that is intuitive and relational. "He knows

it in his heart...” Richard has an understanding of knowledge of beliefs and understandings that are not grounded in visual or experiential ‘proof’; an understanding that the world can be sensed and sense-able in different ways. In sensing the tiger and knowing that he is there Lee touches on knowledge of perception. Richard has an understanding of this kind of sensitive perceptibility as he does not need for Lee to have actually seen the tiger for him to know the truth of Lee’s statement. Richard states that Lee “knows it in his heart” but cannot explain or develop this idea further in conversation. Richard understands that the world is perceivable in ways that do not necessarily call for concrete sensing. Ways of perceiving and knowing that involve sensitivity and intuitiveness. Ways of knowing that involve being known, that understanding is in relation with the world.

When the hunter returns to the village he tells the villagers that there is not a tiger and they return to their work sighing their disappointment. The hunter then moves to continue on his way.

As the hunter passed by, Lee stepped out in front of him. “There is a tiger, isn’t there?” he said. “I know there is—but I’ll never tell.” The hunter stared down at him. Then he smiled. Then he winked. Then he continued on his way.

Out in the grassy clearing, beyond the rice fields, beyond the swamp, behind the oak woods, the tiger rested on his back in the shade, one fat paw drooping comfortably onto his white chest. (Allen, 1992)

These three experiences came forth from the background of our daily storied lives. They have been illuminated within my memory, yet they are very ordinary. They are experiences that are potentialized in our daily story times. They are events that speak to and of parenting, that speak to and of teaching, that speak to and of reading. They are events that speak of what may be conceived when children, parents and literature dwell together.

As I have remembered and reflected upon these events, as I have told their tales, they have called me to understand more fully the nature of response and the response abilities of young children. I have had the experience of observing the embodiment of a shared reading event between two children; children who engaged in a shared reading event where Richard provided the scaffold for Alexander through the oral reading of the text. The text called for them to interpret it in both conversation and dramatization. Interruptions occurred during the reading, promoting a shared interpretation and deepening each child's experience. The play following the shared reading was a spontaneous form of response. With a statement of "Let's pretend that the kitchen is the ocean..." the response was called forth and shared between the children. They negotiated the tension between

their possible world and the reality of the confines of the environment they knew themselves to be in. They have created and transformed meaning into a world that was outside the dailyness of their lives. Together they constructed their response through and within their storied lifeworld.

Through conversation the ghost who demands that young children be given opportunities to explore initial responses has again visited me. The ghost who haunts me with the visions of young children whose initial responses were considered to be off topic and therefore not taken up in conversation. Alexander's telling comment "bones" and Richard's subsequent demand for clarification illuminated that indeed "bones" was responsible to the text and a connection with and between text and reader. This ghost demands that I give dignity and consideration to all responses, not just an acceptance of all responses, a 'Thank you for sharing', but that in generosity may come generativity. This ghost asks that I understand that being open to possibilities may deepen my own understandings of self, children, texts, and response. Remembering and reflecting that to take risks, as responsive readings often require, involves knowing that one will be listened to. This is the legacy of my ghost of 'interpretive charity'.

Through the responsive reading experience I shared with Richard and the story Tiger I am once again called to reflect upon children's abilities to respond deeply and profoundly with texts. Young children are capable of entering into

conversation and taking up powerful issues called forth. To explore deep connections with the human experience of the world and to be sensitive to ways of knowing illuminates for me the power behind responsive readings. Tiger remains with both Richard and I. It has left with us memories of journeys with a text so profound that it called forth deep understandings and interpretations. Journeys with a text that invited re-reading permitting not only another involvement but adding dimensions. Journeys with a text that invited re-reading promoting response over time. Our journey with this text continues on for in its reading it has made us its own.

We bear a memory or trace with us of the places we have passed through, the experiences we have undergone. Reading marks us in a deep sense, if we allow it and if the text leaves room for our wanderings. (Jardine, 1994, pp. vii-viii.)

These experiences have also called me to reflect upon the need to provide, to seek out, and engage with texts that evoke deep issues involving our understandings of self, others, and the world. Text choice plays a crucial role in reader response. Compelling texts have an integrity that evokes the places of response. Texts that evoke places that have room for the reader to wander along the pathways of its terrain. Provocative texts bid the reader 'well come'; they are an alluring terrain of possibilities. A terrain of possibilities supporting and participating in and with responsive conversations. Profound responses come from

deep conversations with provocative texts, deep conversations with and between text, reader, and others.

I have not yet ceased my exploration of response experiences. I have been called forth to consider once again the powerful nature of responsive readings. To consider the response- abilities of young children; response- abilities that hearken to be listened to, encouraged and nurtured. Response- abilities that reflect my own responsibilities as a parent and teacher of young children. “ All we can do is deeply understand the world that the child is entering and then invite that child to enter.” (Jardine, 1994, p. 21) Trying to maintain a sensitive awareness to experiences, seeking to interpret and understand responsive readings I continue to explore along the horizon of possibilities; a horizon of possibilities that with each movement promotes new perceptions and understandings.

CHAPTER FOUR

BRIDGEBUILDING

The question of reading, response and interpretation has long been a part of my history. A history where, at times, I have been blissfully unaware. A history where, at times, it has quietly remained in the background. A history where, at times, it has been taken for granted. And a history where the question has been thrust into the forefront of my thoughts and actions. In exploring the question I now understand that it is not one that I have only asked, that it too is one that has asked me. It is a question that has arisen out of events. It is a question that has arisen as part of my participation in the world. A participation in traditions that have played out with and through me, traditions of reading, teaching and understanding. A participation in traditions of which I am only partially aware and of which I try to understand in order to make decisions about how to live in this space, the space of parenting, teaching and reading, well.

Aspects of reading, response and interpretation have arisen at different times in my teaching, in variant voices and variant instances. They have addressed and made a claim on me. A claim I have felt penetrate deeply and begin to work

from within. (Abram, 1996) An address and claim evocative and insistent, calling for understanding.

A Kindergarten Home

In the journey of my teaching career I have had the fortune to ‘begin’, to be a ‘first year’ teacher in a Kindergarten classroom. Kindergarten housed my initial forays into the world of public education. Kindergarten was the bridge between being an initiate and becoming a member of the teaching profession. It was not a position I advocated for, not one I sought for I wanted to be a ‘grade one teacher’, but one in which I found myself for six years. Kindergarten was a place in which I understand now many possibilities, possibilities I have rarely glimpsed since, were housed. In teaching Kindergarten I took for granted the question of responsive readings, I had not yet heeded its calling and claim.

In teaching Kindergarten I based my plans, my planning on books. Books were the bridges between the children and myself. Lessons, units, themes, curriculum all arrived in the classroom through and with books. In our Kindergarten classrooms we were able to become a family of learners who explored, conversed and lived through experiences with texts. Experiences of and with texts that enriched us as members of the family, enriched us individually, and enriched the community we shared. Through literature I strived to contribute to the

establishment of a learning space where “teachers and learners and subjects would be in vital community with one another” (Palmer, 1993, p. xix).

While teaching Kindergarten I was housed in a space that enabled and encouraged ‘loving the good’ (Lee, 1998). A place where the confines and boxes of teaching de-coding had not yet moved in to be unpacked and applied to the members of our family.

The more prevalent view of language, at least since the scientific revolution, and still assumed in some manner by most linguists today, considers any language to be a set of arbitrary but conventionally agreed upon words, or “signs”, linked by a purely formal system of syntactic and grammatical rules. Language, in this view, is rather like a *code*: it is a way of *representing* actual things and events in the perceived world, but it has no internal, nonarbitrary connections to that world, and hence is readily separable from it. (Abram, 1996, p. 77)

In our Kindergarten classrooms language and literature were understanding. Language was not a tool for our conscious and arbitrary use but was what housed our understandings, our struggles and our growth. Reading was not de-coding, was not an act of trying to break down language in order to put it back together, was not premised on the view of the young ‘sounding it out’. Language was not conceived of “as a code—as a determinate and mappable structure composed of arbitrary signs linked by purely formal rules.” (Abram, 1996, p. 79) Language was understood to be “a living, multivocal, ambiguous community of relations in which

teacher and child and the wisdom of the world are mutually engaged” (Jardine and Field, 1996, p. 257).

In our Kindergarten classrooms there was time to explore. By its nature Kindergarten time was not locked in, not dependent upon daily time tableing. When I was teaching Kindergarten there was not a formalized curriculum requiring blocks of time to be devoted to certain subjects. Kindergarten time was an opening through which explorations could take the time they needed. Explorations that included significant time spent living with books. There was time to explore favorite stories, old and new stories, stories authored by ‘outsiders’, and stories authored by ourselves both communally and individually.

Stories, like rhymed poems or songs, readily incorporate themselves into our felt experience; the shifts of action echo and resonate our own encounters—in hearing or telling the story we vicariously *live* it, and the travails of its characters embed themselves into our own flesh. (Abram, 1996, p. 120)

In living with and through stories there was time for response and response over time. There were times when the work of interpretation was occasioned by readings and the responses of others. There was time to investigate the impact that shared literature had on individuals, our community, and our perceptions and understandings of the world we live in.

I found teaching Kindergarten unexpectedly fulfilling. Here was a place where I could live in a nested family of relations with children, books, and

understanding. Here was a place where reading was truth and we disciples of its teachings. In Kindergarten I found a home, a place where I belonged, a place to teach. "To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced." (Palmer, 1993, pp. xi-xii)

In the years I spent teaching Kindergarten there were many struggles, many growing and learning opportunities. There were difficulties. A prevailing difficulty and struggle surrounded the issue of 'child-centered' classrooms, classrooms that left me unsettled. Classrooms that left me resonating with questions and concerns. There were 'child-centered' classrooms, I had visited, where it appeared the children had been abandoned and the teacher had abdicated their responsibility. Yet I too considered myself, and our Kindergarten program 'child-centered'. There were times of struggle, of growth, of learning, of difficulties and it is not my intent to 'paint a picture' of a flattened, smoothed out landscape of teaching. However, in teaching Kindergarten I did not encounter the arrival of the question of reading and response. In teaching Kindergarten I was not "thrown" (Heidegger, 1996). I, a young, enthusiastic, and naïve I, was able to live in a space where my passions of reading, children, and teaching were able to come together and conceive something greater than each alone. I was able to dwell in a home where the nature of reading I am beholden to was a gentle, secure foundation upon which to base my teaching. A

gentle, secure foundation bridging, weaving, and interrelating, myself, the children, and our understandings of the world.

A Community of Readers

Having taught Kindergarten for a few years when I was on a leave from teaching I returned to the University to take a class. I knew that when I returned to teaching the following year that it would be time for a change. When returning to teaching I was hopeful that I would have the opportunity to teach a new grade, that I would have the opportunity to further my journey of teaching in a classroom of grade one or two students. I felt that to teach grade one or two was a natural progression, that as each year my students had left our Kindergarten space so too was it now time for me to move to a new space. Part of preparing for that move involved the decision to take an elementary language arts methodology course at the University of Calgary.

Part of the requirements for the elementary language arts methodology course included weekly labs, weekly visits to a local school to observe and interact with grade one/two students during their language arts instructional block. A language arts instructional block that was premised on a 'Community of Readers' program. 'Community of Readers' the words sounded familiar, the promise of children and texts engaged meaningfully with one another was housed in their

breath. This was language that came somewhat close to describing my Kindergarten experience. However, the 'Community of Readers' program housed in this classroom left me unsettled, disoriented, left me questioning. It "threw" me. (Heidegger, 1996) Within this classroom's 'Community of Readers' were housed alien notions to my own experiences, my experiences of reading with my mother and my own children, and my experiences of engaging in reading events with the children I had taught.

Within this classroom children were organized into small groups based upon reading ability. I was not to know how their 'reading ability' had been decided but in this organization I began to be haunted by my own schooling experience. I remembered how it had felt to be part of the 'bluebird readers', to be part of the 'slow readers'. I began to feel uncomfortable. The classroom had many books within its boundaries, books that were housed in color coded tubs, books that had been leveled. Correspondingly, each reading group was able to pick a text to read from the right colored tub. An attempt to have children engaged in reading books that were at their 'ability level'. There was familiarity in the desire to have children engage with books independently, or within groups. There was familiarity in desiring to provide children with a large variety of texts from which to choose. The leveled texts and coded buckets allowed the specter haunting me to begin to take a more solid form. Here again were imposed limits, imposed boundaries, and

signifiers of those who can and those who can't. Here again were strange signifiers of what was reading.

Upon finishing the reading of the text the children in each group then moved to choosing a 'response card'. These too were color-coded depending upon the type of response starter written on the card. The children recorded on a graph what color of response card they had chosen. They then completed the response starter in their 'response logs.' These cards had upon them such sentence starters for response as I think... I wonder... I predict. When the children had completed their response in their logs they shared what they had written with the others in their group. This sharing too followed a set of scripted instructions laminated on a card. Each member of the group would read their response aloud from their log to the others, then the listening members of the group would read off their laminated card. It read: Thank you _____ for sharing.

At the end of each of our weekly visits, indeed at the end of the course, I was left feeling uncomfortable, feeling out of place, feeling dissatisfied. Was what I had been witnessing 'reader-response', was it responsible teaching and response enabling teaching? Was response to be packaged and reduced to fill in the blanks echoing the basalization of reading? Or was this 'Community of Readers' program mimicking the methods of reader response, was the teacher without knowledge of the wider community of reading, was it simply trading "certain symptoms for

others, shift(ing) the locus of dis-ease from place to place” (Abram, 1996, p.21).

This program of reading appeared to be a program of “readings that map and dissect, readings that hear a rustling of unheard sounds, that count little grey pronouns for pleasure or instruction” (Byatt, 1990, p.471). A program of basal reading and readers in disguise.

In its scriptedness, in its prescribed activities, this program put the children and the work of reading out of play with one another. It removed the to and fro, the losing and finding, the movement within the reading event. It silenced the reading events allowing them nothing to say about the pathways of their journeys, how the text could be and is to be read, about what the right pathways to follow would be in *this* reading. There was not room for stories to penetrate deeply, to engage profoundly, to be an electric, potentialized field of experience. Reader Response was reduced to a technique, to the application of technical knowledge. First this, then this, color in, fill in, say this, say that, done. In its scriptedness and its prescribedness, in its application this program of Reader Response replaced an opportunity for children and teachers to come together in ‘loving the good’. (Lee, 1998) There was a bridge missing between my understanding of reading, of the work and responsibility of reading, of the joy and angst of reading, and what I was witness to as a program of reading.

Upon completion of this course, upon the completion of my leave of absence from teaching, the journey of my career took me to a new school and a new grade. It was a move I had applied for, one that I actively sought, the locale causing some hesitation, but a grade I was excited to be teaching. I had arrived in a grade two classroom.

The 'Grade Two' Room

I had hesitations surrounding this new job. I was confident in my ability to teach, in my ability to create a learning space to house a family of learners. I was not confident in my ability to 'fit in' with my new found staff members. A staff whom I was told in the interview had been together for an extended period of time. A staff of many who had been teaching the same grade, in the same room for many years, some in fact since the school had opened, a staff who I was informed had developed 'cliques'. I debated and wondered the wisdom of accepting this position but was won over by the excitement, by the opportunity to dwell together, once again, with children and books. I was won over by the excitement of dwelling in the space of teaching.

Upon arriving in this new house and this 'grade two room' I eagerly began to unpack my boxes, to sort and sift, ponder and decide what might go where, what I needed to bid this group of students welcome, what I needed to do to make myself

welcome. Along with unpacking my own boxes I soon discovered that others had arrived, had come along with this 'grade two room'. This 'grade two room', this space had boxes of its own in closets, attics, and basements. It had boxes full of histories and traditions that I was not familiar with. Boxes of histories and traditions I was not familiar with in the role of teacher but ones that again echoed experiences of my own schooling, of schooled reading.

I began to encounter layers of boxes, layers of questions, of expectations, of agendas. I encountered boxes of a reading series waiting expectantly to be unpacked and used as a 'program'. When it was discovered that I was not intending to use the series as a program the questioning began. If I was not basing my language arts program, my reading program around these materials, what then was I going to use? My response—books were what I had planned on using. My response began to generate questions of my own. Where was the bookcase for the classroom? There wasn't one. Was there any classroom library materials? No. Were there multiple copies of texts I could bring into my classroom? No. What reading materials were available for classroom use? The reading series.

I also began to encounter questions as to how I was going to teach the children the 'skills' they needed to 'decode', what phonics program was I going to use? I was handed a binder bursting with worksheet pages on vowels, blends,

digraphs, and sentence structure. Pages I was expected to put into booklets so the children could learn phonics. Pages I refused to use.

In moving into this house of learning I found myself in the midst of questions of reading. I was ill at ease, I was out of place. I was unsettled and uncomfortable with the kind of teaching and reading that was being promoted, that was expected by the other members of this house of learning. There was an open gulf, a chasm between myself and the other members of this house. There was no bridge and no materials with which to build one. We stood opposite one another without understanding, language, history, or a shared sense of community.

My position within the world shifted. No longer was I living where I felt I belonged. I encountered a world and tradition of reading in which I could not participate. When I rejected this tradition of reading, when I refused to teach in the expected manner, when this tradition of reading and I could not live together, we both became more evident. Like the 'Community of Readers' program I had witnessed this tradition of reading appeared strange and in its appearance it reflected my boundaries, my prejudices, and myself. In its appearance this tradition of reading, along with the experience of the 'Community of Readers' program, enabled self-understanding. "Self-understanding always occurs through understanding something other than the self." (Gadamer, 1989, p.97) These

traditions read back to me a version of myself, a version of myself for whom these traditions would not do.

These experiences stand out against the background life of teaching and learning that I have found myself in. They stand out against the everydayness of being. Yet they too are everyday. They are not isolated experiences of *mine*. They are not moments of only *my* experience but are moments of the everyday. They are of the world. They are unavoidably deeply connected to *me*, but they are not *about me*, they are about that *of which* I have experienced. They are of the worlds of reading and teaching. Their difficulties and troubles are part of the difficulties and troubles of the world of teaching and reading.

These moments, these events, of struggle and difficulty in the world of teaching are moments of teaching. They are moments when our relationships to children, reading, and teaching are illuminated. They are moments when we question what it means to teach, what it means to read, and what it means to live well within this place. They are moments of a “haunted and generative space, full of tales told to anyone who will listen.” (Jardine, 1994, p.17) They are eventful moments that may speak to those who will listen, that may speak to those who teach. They are eventful moments of tales told of teaching and reading.

In trying to understand the meaningfulness of my encounters with these traditions of reading I am trying to understand both the traditions and myself.

Trying to understand the traditions that I am living out as a subject of the world, as a public self. Trying to understand my way around the place of reading. The quest to know my way around and with the places of reading and teaching, to know myself as a reader, parent and teacher has brought me to the question of reading and response.

Reader Response

In understanding the traditions of reading that I had inherited and that I was living out, and those that I could not live well with, those I rejected I came to reader response. The events of reading shared helped me to come to understand Reader Response theory as the tradition, which shaped my understanding, my interpretation of those events. Reader Response theory made those interpretations possible and bounded them. In order to understand these events more fully, I needed to understand the tradition of Reader Response more fully. I needed to inquire into the tradition, to engage in conversation with it, to reflect upon what it reveals and what it conceals.

Reader Response theory is itself part of a larger tradition of understanding reading, a tradition that is amidst others of understanding, of teaching and of authority. Reader Response theory emerged as a reaction to the tradition of New Criticism. New Criticism is a theory of literary criticism, which posits that the

meaningfulness of reading resides solely within the text. The text is a solid, determinate, complete object. The text was considered to be an object in and of itself, “self-contained and autonomous” (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988, p. 5). Meaning was implanted within a text by the author and accessible through the application of correct procedure, of correct technique. Expert readers, those who had mastered the techniques and procedures, could lead novice or initiate readers to that meaning through the use of the correct methods, of the correct tools. The text held the ultimate authority, an authority stable over time, an authority independent of who was its reader.

In the teachings of New Criticism, developing an understanding of a text took place within the presence of a teacher who was a model and mediator. “If it is believed that meaning resides largely or even entirely within the text, it follows that pupils can be taught how to get at meaning by careful or close reading.” (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988, p. 6) The teacher is in charge, is conducting the reading of the text and its meaning is unlocked through the teacher’s questioning. Questions that direct the inquiry and its point of arrival.

Readers, in effect, will have arrived without really having traveled, as Barnes (1976) puts it; that is, without having observed and inspected the sites along the way and without having been led astray by ambiguous signs, intriguing side-trips and frustrating dead-ends. (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988, p. 7)

Responding to the dominance of New Criticism and its view of the text as an entity of its own right literary criticism began to consider the role of the reader, and in the consideration of the role of the reader literary criticism moved towards Reader Response. Literary criticism began to consider that the “literary work is much more than an object that exists in and of itself, much more than the creation of the literary artist; it is also the product of an act of reading and of readers.” (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988, p. 15)

Louise Rosenblatt’s work focussed on the active role of the reader in the “transactional” evocation of meaning. In her theory of reading the reader was in a ‘transactional’ relationship with the text, a relationship in which there is a ongoing cognizance of the text. In Rosenblatt’s theory of “aesthetic reading” the act of reading is a transaction between reader and text, a transaction leading to the evocation of the “poem”. She wrote, “the reader’s creation of a poem out of a text must be an active, self-ordering and self-corrective process.” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 11)

Louise Rosenblatt’s work drew the attention of literary theorists to the active and particular reader. A particular reader engaging with a particular text at a particular time.

The poem, then, must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text

his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of a text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being. (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 12)

Her theory allows that with each reading a different “poem” may be evoked, to change any element in the reading may spark the creation of a new “poem.”

With a theory of “transactional reading” Rosenblatt’s work acknowledges the creation of the “poem”, acknowledges the creative aspect of meaning, and acknowledges the powerful affect of reading. Reading has the potential to powerfully affect the reader.

In encountering Louise Rosenblatt’s work and theory of reading I was hailed by its familiarity. I responded to it with the joy of recognition. I responded to the truth in this understanding of reading as something, which I had already known but known in a pre-verbal way. Together with the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, (Gadamer, 1989, Weinsheimer, 1986) Rosenblatt’s work gave me a language and theory in which I could begin to articulate my own understandings.

As with Louise Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading, the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer denies the understanding of the text as having a single, fixed, certain interpretation of meaning. Gadamer holds

that texts are multiple in meaning, that “meanings represent a fluid multiplicity of possibilities” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 268), that the author’s interpretation is a first interpretation whose meaning is surpassed in the texts presentation. The text reaches presentation through the reader. The reader in and of herself is not the subject of the reading; the text reaches its presentation through the reader.

(Gadamer, 1989, p. 103) In its re-presentation the text experiences “an increase in being.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140) The text is free to enter into new relationships, to enter into new re-presentations. Its meaning arises in the instance of the play, in the to and fro movement between itself and reader, in the performative event of reading.

We can approach a text as a human voice out of the past, a voice that asks to be heard and that requests a response. Approached in this manner, a text is not an object, but is rather a work. The text’s suspension from the world can be removed, returning the text to a living communication. The words of the text are now no longer considered as simply logical entities, but the word is alive, is concrete, is sensual. The text does not speak by itself, it is not a static, conceptual thing, an atemporal essence. The text is a being that realizes its power as an oral happening in time. (Sardello, 1975, p. 277)

Reading Gadamer’s and Rosenblatt’s work and understanding their positions within the larger traditions of reading theory and understanding gave me a way to begin to interpret my own experiences and questions regarding reading. They gave me a way into understanding some of the history that was being played

out in my experiences, particularly my teaching experiences. I began to understand more fully my position in the teaching of reading and the way in which I had been positioned. I began to understand my dissatisfaction with the 'Community of Readers' program I had witnessed and my dissatisfaction and rejection of the tradition incumbent in teaching based upon a reading series.

In both Rosenblatt's and Gadamer's work I saw an image of myself, I encountered a reading of myself as a teacher. I encountered the 'text' of a work that I read, and in reading I found myself read back in a new way. In the presence of the 'text' of both Rosenblatt's and Gadamer's work I encountered self-understanding. I began to understand the worlds of teaching and reading and my place within those worlds. In understanding the reading events of parenting and teaching I became more fully aware of myself.

As a reader, parent and teacher I have known readings that have penetrated deeply, readings that have embedded themselves within, readings that have been "lived-through" events evoking "poems" (Rosenblatt, 1978). I have known readings that have taken place in a magical temporality; a "secondary world" (Tolkein, 1964), readings that have been events taking place in the "virtual" (Iser, 1978) space between reader and text. I have known readings in which wandering within their terrain has allowed readers to come to know themselves, their world, and the text in new ways. I have known the power of readings in which the

readers, the text, and the reading conceived something greater than each was before. I have known the power of readings that created a space in which to practice obedience to truth (Palmer, 1996, p. xii).

Understanding in reading and teaching comes not from applying methods, not from blindly following the ways ‘it has always been done’, but arises out of the eventfulness of understanding. Our knowing, our theories arise out of eventful encounters with texts, with others, with *something* in the world. Our understandings, our theories are worked out, carried out and are played out in the world. Played out in a world in which we give ourselves over to our theories. We become fully present with our knowing, our methods, our theories. A being present that is a “self-forgetfulness... arising from devoting one’s full attention to the matter at hand” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 126).

The ability to act theoretically is defined by the fact that in attending to something one is able to forget one’s own purposes. But *theoria* is not to be conceived primarily as a subjective conduct, as a self-determination of the subject, but in terms of what it is contemplating. *Theoria* is a true participation, not something active but something passive (*pathos*), namely being totally involved in and carried away by what one sees. (Gadamer, 1989, pp. 124-125)

Understanding in reading and teaching comes from “being totally involved in and carried away by” (Gadamer, 189, p. 125) the very acts of teaching and reading. “As a movement of tradition and its interpretation, understanding has the

character of a process that one participates in rather than something constructed” (Risser, 1997, p. 7). Our theories of teaching and reading arise from giving oneself over to the space in which one practices an obedience to truth. (Palmer, 1993, p. 69) Our knowledge, our interpretations, our theories are strengthened by our participation in an understanding that is like a “festival” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 124). An understanding that exists by being played out and over again, that in each playing it experiences an “increase in being” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140), that in each playing it is not “one and the same thing; it exists by being always something different.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 124) Our knowledge, our interpretations, our theories find their strength not in the finalities of saying, “*this* is it”, “*now* I understand”, but in their ability to experience an “increase in being” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140), in their generousness and generativity.

The theories of teaching and reading that house my understandings are care-fully bounded and open, are hospitable and welcoming to new stories, to new experiences. In the reading of the tales told by these experiences, my understandings, my theories are able to experience an “increase in being” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140). The tales told are told for what they may generate, for what understandings they may further. They are told for our theories, our understandings are “... arrived at referentially and relationally rather than (for want of a better word) absolutely.” (Smith, 1994, p. 119)

CHAPTER FIVE

GATHERING AROUND THE GIFT

Being beholden to a nature of reading that invites ‘loving the good’ (Lee, 1998) is the power behind my teaching. It is what compels me to invite the young into this place of learning. Inviting the young to come and journey with me in this place where we may dwell together, this place of reading. Giving the gift of reading is the means of my teaching. It is what compels me to ‘play’ in the ‘game’ of teaching and it makes much of what I do with children possible. It is where I belong, where I reside. Reading houses and bounds the space in which I seek to teach. “To teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced.” (Palmer, 1993, p. 69)

Creating a learning space in which the gift of reading may be given and opened involves creating an inner space of heart and mind, a space that is central to the spirituality of reading. Creating a space in which we can read and be read, a space in which to participate in the event of reading, a space to be and become. Creating a space that is an opening, a clearing for the work of reading.

In it’s intention, Reader Response sought the creation of a space where children’s voices could be heard. A place where reader’s were to be given a say in

the conduct of the classroom readings. A chance to voice their responses to a text, a chance to voice the meanings in which they have participated. Reader Response sought to move the space filled with the authoritative voices of teachers whose “role becomes one of serving pupils as a mediator, one whose role is to train pupils into a style of ‘objective’ reading.” (Dias & Hayhoe, 1988, p. 6) into a space in which teachers could dwell with texts and children. Reader Response sought to create a space where individual students responses to a text could be elicited, could be heard, a space where “poems” could be evoked.

To study with a teacher who not only speaks but listens, who not only gives answers but asks questions and welcomes insights, who provides information and theories that do not close doors but open new ones, who encourages students to help each other learn—to study with such a teacher is to know the power of a learning space. (Palmer, 1993, p. 70)

To know the power of a learning space is to know the power of a space that invites presenting and opening the gift of reading. Parker J. Palmer (1993) writes of three essential dimensions of a learning space: openness, boundaries, and an air of hospitality.

Openness

One of the essential dimensions of a learning space is openness. A space which is open is one in which the impediments to learning that clutter our

classrooms and our consciousness have been removed. A space which is open resists the tendency to fill it, to pack it full of activity. Courage is needed to keep a space open, to venture in an open space where not knowing is a call to adventure. "Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 69)

As teachers we have many demands on our time. We have much to do and say. We have days filled with dayplans, timetables, meetings, reporting procedures, and curriculum. The more we do, the more we say, the more we fill-in the space, the less understandable our curriculum becomes, the less able our students are to enter into a relationship with the very curriculum we are endeavoring to teach.

I have known classrooms where the days were so packed with reading activities that the children never had the time to actually engage with texts. They were so busy 'theming' that they never actually read. Their reading times were cluttered with activity, filled with labeling, cutting, coloring, pasting, practicing de-coding and re-coding language.

"If it (reading) were a de-coding then it would mean that the reader already has the key. Meeting a text, then, would be at best simply the re-coding of what the reader already knows. He has the key to the code. All that is necessary is to match the key with the garbled message." (Sardello, 1975, p. 274)

In this classroom there was no time for the children, teacher and books to dwell with each other. They were so busy covering the reading curriculum through the daily activities that there was no time to uncover the work of reading. The daily activities had taken away from the real 'hard work' of reading, from the joy and the angst, from the losing and finding, from the to and fro, from the three thousand sweating horses behind every jewel. (Hirshfield, 1997, p. 43) There was no time to dwell in a learning space, no time to lose oneself, to be outside oneself to be "wholly with something else." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 126) No open space in which to meet, to be, and to dwell wholly with reading.

Boundaries

Spaces have edges, parameters, fences, limits, boundaries. A clearing, an open space is precisely that because it is bounded.

"It is not a question of subsequently finding an external setting for a work that is complete in itself but of obeying the space-creating potentiality of the work itself, which had to adapt to what is given as well as to create its own conditions." (Gadamer, 1989, p. 157)

The openness of a space is both created by its boundaries and by what the work demands of it. In a learning space that houses the gift of reading its boundaries are defined and defended with care, with care-full consideration. In a reading space whose boundaries are defined and defended with care not just any

response to text will do. I wonder... I predict... If I were the author I would... I like..., color in the response graph, read aloud your 'work' to the others, repeat after me "Thank you for sharing", next, is not a carefully bounded space, not a space bounded by and defended with care. An open learning space bounded with balance and care invites and supports the hard work, the difficulties of reading.

Hospitality

"To deeply understand the world that the child is entering and then invite that child to enter" (Jardine, 1994, p. 21) requires an environment of hospitality. An environment of hospitality is more meaningful than just being pleasant and amiable, more than sunshiny smiles and everything is wonderful demeanors, more than just making a classroom a nice place to be. On hospitality Parker J. Palmer (1993) writes

this may suggest a classroom lacking in essential rigor, a place in which questions of true and false, right and wrong, are subordinated to making sure that everyone "has a nice day". But that would be a false understanding of hospitality. Hospitality is not an end in itself. It is offered for the sake of what it can allow, permit, encourage, and yield. A learning space needs to be hospitable not to make the learning painless but to make the painful things possible. (p. 74)

Hospitality allows a participation in the events of reading. It allows for the children, teacher and text to be brought fully into the play, to acknowledge and

work in the midst of things. It allows for players to participate in the eventfulness of reading, in the transformation the generation of understanding occasions. It allows becoming one who knows and is known. (Palmer, 1993)

The play of reading and what we may become in its presence does not abandon the role of the teacher, but allows us to take it up more fully, in a way that responsibly meets the young and the world. We do not abandon our students to their own devices, their own concerns, nor do we abandon the concerns of curriculum and our accountability for assessment. We do not abandon the demands for eliciting good work from our students and ourselves.

The learning space we endeavor to create in schools must be both ethical and accountable. Our students, curriculum, and ourselves must live in an interrelated, interweaving nest of relations. This nest of educational relations is itself responsible to the world. The space for reading and response we create in schools is not one in which anything goes, not one in which any response will do. We do not want our students to wander the terrain of reading aimlessly. We want to lead them somewhere to something. For them to journey forth in an adventure and return differently. We want our students and ourselves to experience an “increase in being.” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140) We want the spaces in our schools to be profoundly responsible to education.

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from the ruin which, except for the renewal, except for the coming of the new and the young, would be inevitable. And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world, and leave them to their own devices, nor strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (Arendt, 1969, p. 196)

A Community of Readers Re-visited

Reader Response theory's uncovering of the necessary participation of the reader in the production of meaning revealed an understanding of our students and ourselves as readers, revealed an "increase in being" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140) in our understanding of reading. But in that uncovering, in that event of *aletheia*, what was covered up? What was forgotten? What was concealed?

In doing 'Community of Readers', in the encouragement and the creation of the I think... I wonder... I predict... space of reading, response is playing out subjectively into *my* response, *your* response, *their* response and readers find no need to truly meet texts or to engage in conversations of understanding with others. Each response stands alone, isolated from the others, its understandings and claims to truth not at risk, not at play. Our responses in isolation are allowed to become self-identical, no longer signifying anything beyond themselves. In the nature of

their personal responses students find themselves only in themselves and not in a world filled with others. Claims to truth are not taken up, not played out. The multiplicity of a text is dispersed into the multiplicity of its readers. And in its dispersal it violates already real, existing and vital interconnections. The threads of understanding become pulled from the web. Thank you for sharing. Next. The sometimes, the often ‘hard work’, the painful struggle of understanding dissipates. What the children, teacher and the text may become in dwelling together, how they could experience an “increase in being” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140) is lost in individualism. The children, teacher and text no longer dwell in the play ground of reading.

In the privileging of personal response have we delved into the belief that the work of reading can become painless, or that making our students feel good, “Thank you for sharing”, is a sign of success? Have we silenced or trivialized the generativity and transformation of meaning that the arrival of the children portends? Can the I think... I wonder... I predict... version of response be re-invigorated, re-enlivened, re-generated by the children encountering this world of reading? Is it an understanding of reading that is generous and open to the arrival of the young, the arrival of the children? Or in the privileging of any response have we abandoned the children and our own responsibilities as teachers? “Such examples require us to own up to the ways in which [reader response] and child-

centered pedagogy is continually and irremediably shadowed by the possibility of abandonment.” (Field & Jardine, 1994, p. 259)

A child-centered curriculum underlying the practice of reader response does not mean that we abandon our responsibility to the children and to the world of reading. We are still responsible to nurture, encourage, and prompt diverse, rich, thoughtful, and responsible responses. We are still responsible to expect good work from our students and from ourselves.

In the [reader response] classroom, the question of better or worse ways to live (in language), the question of better or worse interpretations of a text, must be able to be raised. We need to admit that we can still recognize and that we do still value deep, rich, sensitive, careful, thoughtful, and provocative readings of a text. (Field & Jardine, 1994, p. 261)

Frederick

All along the meadow where the cows grazed and the horses ran, there was an old stone wall. In that wall, not far from the barn and the granary, a chatty family of field mice had their home. (Lionni, 1973)

Richard: Are mice helpful to people sometimes?

Emma: My grandma had a mouse in her cottage and it bit her couch.

Me: I don't think mice are very helpful to people.

Shae: But they're helpful to other mouses.

Richard: Their helpful to owls because owls eat them, so do hawks, so do coyotes, and so do the cougars. There is a cougar out in the country and I saw his tracks at Gramma's and Mosho's.

As this reading begins questions and comments arise from the readers. They reach towards the text relating it to their own experiences, to situations they have encountered, to their own understandings of relationships. Their questions, their comments, their initial responses to the story may or may not be taken up by the others. There is potential in their responses for connections between the text and the communal readers. Their tentative reaches, their initial forays into the world of this text are presented and accepted. They are welcome to speak of their experiences, of their initial understandings. A connection is being established between the readers and the text.

"Close your eyes," said Frederick, as he climbed on a big stone. "Now I send you the rays of the sun. Do you feel how their golden glow..." And as Frederick spoke of the sun the four little mice began to feel warmer. Was it Frederick's voice? Was it magic? "And how about the colors, Frederick?" they asked anxiously. "Close your eyes again," Frederick said. And when he told them of the blue periwinkles, the red poppies in the yellow wheat, and the green leaves of the berry bush, they saw the colors as clearly as if they had been painted in their minds. (Lionni, 1973)

Me: When he says to close their eyes and he tells them about the sun and the golden glow and they wonder, it says "Was it Frederick's voice? Was it magic?"
 Richard: because it looks like the sun (points to the yellow shadings on the illustrations of the rocks) and they can feel a little warmer.

Max: They can feel a little warmer just by someone talking to them and love is warm.

Me: Do you think Frederick is sending them a little love too when he is talking?

Max: Um hum. And then he reminds them of the colors.

Richard: And then he tells them poetry too.

“And the words, Frederick?” Frederick cleared his throat, waited a moment, and then, as if from a stage, he said:

*“Who scatters snowflakes? Who melts the ice?
Who spoils the weather? Who makes it nice?
Who grows the four-leaf clovers in June?
Who dims the daylight? Who lights the moon?”*

*Four little field mice who live in the sky.
Four little field mice... like you and I.*

*One is the Springmouse who turns on the showers.
Then comes the Summer who paints in the flowers.
The Fallmouse is next with walnuts and wheat.
And winter is last... with little cold feet.*

*Aren't we lucky the seasons are four?
Think of a year with one less... or one more!” (Lionni, 1973)*

Max: Which is the words he gathered.

Emma: The mice didn't think Frederick could do this but then they remember him saying that he did work really.

Max: He was a working mouse.

Richard: Because when they don't have anything to do Frederick can tell them about the colors and remind them about the colors, and about the sun to make them feel warm. The love is warm, the love in the words.

As Frederick has gathered the sun rays, the colors, and the words so too have the children gathered. They have gathered around the text, and around each other's responses. Their responses no longer stand as isolated, individual responses

but have begun to be formed and shaped by the participation of the others. They have been brought into conversations with the voices of the text and the others. They have begun to respond as a community. Their responses become interconnected and interdependent. They are weaving a web of understanding.

When Frederick had finished, they all applauded. "But Frederick," they said, "you are a poet!" Frederick blushed, took a bow, and said shyly, "I know it." (Lionni, 1973)

Max: This book isn't just about mice. It is about people and how maybe you can be helpful in a different way.

Me: I agree with you. I think Leo Lionni is trying to tell us something about people. There are people who are great cooks, people who are great at fixing things, telling stories, artists,

Emma: That is why I color all the time so that I can be a good artist when I grow up.

Max: I want to be a paleontologist.

Richard: I want to be an NHL hockey player.

Shae: I want to be an artist too.

Me: Everyone here is good at different things and we are all an important part of our community and I think that is what the mice find out about Frederick.

We have collapsed into our independent offerings. I have unwittingly sparked that collapse. It has happened "over and above [my] wanting and willing" (Gadamer, 1989, p. xviii). It has happened as I have tried to read Max's comment about the nature of this story, a story not just about mice but about people, a story about community. The children offer up their hopes for their future careers, their wishes for when they are all grown-up. In their offerings are insights into their

individual dreams, talents, and desires. They are honest offerings of themselves. I accept their offerings with what I hope is dignity, acknowledging that I know they all have different talents. I try to re-visit, to hearken back to the world that housed our communal responses but the magic has been suspended and we are unable to return. The world that was familiar now seems strange.

In reading Frederick we have been able to step in and out of conversations supporting the development of communal understanding. There have been moments that flowed and gathered us together as a community. Moments when we have explored together, not isolated individuals, but as a community. There have also been moments when we have dropped out of the communal world and back into our own subjectivities. Moments of “I want to be a...”. The children whose voices resonate here are all friends. They know each other, they have been sometime classmates, and they play together. They also know me. They know me as ‘Richard’s mom’. In our knowing we form one kind of community, a community of friends. In our readings there are moments when we have formed another community, a community of readers. A community of readers exploring the textual terrain of response together. But good intentions, good books, and good friends could only carry us so far. We lacked a history, the history of time as a community of readers.

I was not their teacher, they were in pairs in two separate classrooms, aside from our exploration of Frederick (as well as two other stories) we did not come together to read, we had not had and would not have the time to establish a learning space. We had not had the time to dwell, to learn our ways, to turn and re-turn to textual worlds. We had not had the time to dwell together with texts, dwelling to allow for the emergence of a rich context of familiarity. We had not had the time to spin a richly interconnected and interdependent web. The web of our good intentions, good books, and good friends could only support so much.

Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes

The book I hold in my hands is a promise, a shared promise with the children who have gathered here with me. It is a promise not spoken but one which is embodied. It is a promise brought forward by our gathering together. It is a promise that emanates from other readings—readings that have been alive, that have played a part in spinning the web in which we find ourselves.

The children and I have a shared history. We have gathered in the presence of texts worthy of contemplation, exploration, and conversation before. We have had time and occasion to wander along the terrain of texts. We have had time and occasion to learn our ways, time and occasion to turn and re-turn to the worlds offered in reading. Together we have played in the grounds of reading.

We gather together again to go journeying. We gather together willing to lose ourselves, to give ourselves over wholly to what may occur in *this* reading. We gather together in a place energized by the possibilities of exploration—explorations of self, others, text, and world. “Hermeneutic pedagogy... requires a giving of one-self over to conversation with young people and building a common shared reality in a spirit of self-forgetfulness, a forgetfulness which is also a form of finding oneself in relation to others.” (Smith, 1991, p.198) Somewhere there will be an opening, a portal through which we may cross the bridge to a world where we may be and become together. We gather together to read Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes.

The day passed too quickly, as it always did. The best part, Sadako thought, was looking at all the things to buy and smelling the good food. ... The worst part was seeing people with ugly whitish scars. The atom bomb had burned them so badly that they no longer looked human...

Excitement grew as the sun went down. When the last dazzling display of fireworks faded from the sky, the crowd carried paper lanterns to the banks of the Ohta River.

Mr. Sasaki carefully lit candles inside of six lanterns—one for each member of the family. The lanterns carried the names of relatives who had

died because of the Thunderbolt [the atom bomb]. Sadako had written Oba chan's name on the side of her lantern. When the candles were burning brightly, the lanterns were launched on the Ohta River. They floated out to sea like a swarm of fireflies against the dark water. (Coerr, 1977, pp. 18-20)

Curtis: I am thinking about what's the party like. Does it have fireworks or is it like a funeral? I mean which kind of thing is it? A party or...

Me: You can have funerals that are a celebration. I mean they are a celebration of people's lives too.

Curtis: I know, I know. Yeah it...

Emily: Celebrations of memory.

Curtis is trying to make sense of the traditional celebration of Peace Day.

The manner of its celebrating is discordant with his understanding of traditions surrounding death, and those surrounding celebrations. He expresses his confusion, the text has evoked a question. In his expression of wondering he opens a conversation, he invites the other readers to help him make sense of a textual occasion. I respond to his questioning, trying to link emerging understandings, trying to link traditions. It is Emily who captures a sense of our understandings, and in capturing she has captivated us all.

"Celebrations of memory." We breathe it in. We let it wash over, in and through us. Our bodies become still. We are at peace. In the ensuing silence, together we dwell.

How profoundly, how deeply Emily has responded to Curtis' query.

Together we have been able to make sense of something presented by the text, something that exists in the world. We have gathered around the text and explored its terrain and how it speaks to the terrain of the world. We have become something different, something more than we could be alone. We have come to an understanding of traditional rites of passing. We have come to an understanding of memory.

Memory allows us to enter dialogue with other beings who are distant in time and space. As our memory deepens and expands, our network of face-to-face relationships grows richer, more complex. We can call upon memory to introduce third parties, and more, to the present conversation, to invoke voices too distant in time or space to speak easily for themselves. (Palmer, 1993, p. 103)

I remember this moment. I remember the feel of the hard floor we sat upon, I remember the way the air stilled, the way our bodies stilled when Emily spoke. I *remember* this moment. It has inscribed me. The eventfulness of this moment has enriched my understanding of the profundities of meaning created in dialogue.

All winter Sadako tried to improve her running speed. To qualify for the racing team in junior high she would have to practice every day. Sometimes after a long run the dizziness returned. Sadako decided not to tell her family about it.

She tried to convince herself that it meant nothing, that the dizziness would go away. But it didn't. It got worse. Frightened, Sadako carried the secret inside of her. She didn't even tell Chizuko, her best friend. (Coerr, 1977, p. 26)

Me: What's going on with why she is dizzy and why after long runs she feels dizzy and she wants it to go away and it doesn't? It's getting worse and she is getting scared but she is not telling anyone about it.

Curtis: Oh! Because it's the atom bomb, it's getting to her.

Emily & Ken: Oh, yeah.

Me: So you think that is what is happening here? Do you think Sadako is starting to get sick?

All: Yes.

Me: And why is she frightened? Why is she keeping it a secret?

Curtis: Because...

Emily: Her parents...

Curtis: She wants to win the race.

Emily: If she tells someone...

Curtis: If she runs a long, a long...

Emily: she might not go.

Curtis: a long time again she'll get real dizzy. Where if she exercises her body will be using up more energy. Her body only has so much energy.

Emily: And if she uses so much running she won't have enough left over for the getting sick.

Curtis: Yeah, because her body needs more energy so she can try not to get sick.

Ken: Yeah, like when you get a cold you are supposed to stay in bed.

As a participating teacher at this point in the text I was compelled to draw the children into conversation surrounding Sadako's signs of illness. This was an important juncture in our journey with the text as it is the initial foray into Sadako's life beginning to change. The text shares with us the images of fear, of

secrecy surrounding Sadako's condition. I feel it is important for the readers to capture an understanding of what these related events are leading to. My voice inflection signals 'teacher mode'. There is something called forth by the text that I want the children to pay attention to, to explore and they recognize this. I am questioning to open up our understandings of textual events. The children are forming "circuits" (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 14) of understanding, each sparking off of the other, each furthered by virtue of the presence of the others.

Ken: My neighbor had leukemia and he died. And we, when I was two and my brother was four, we used to climb the tree, well, I used to stay on the ground and jump up and see if I could see my neighbor. And then... he was my favorite neighbor friend but then he died.

Ken has turned the conversation from a general understanding of illness and the way our bodies function to try to fight to stay healthy towards the sharing of a personal experience. His experience is shared and accepted by the others. The text and the ensuing conversation has contributed to Ken's understanding and his ability to connect his own experiences with the other, the other textual experience. His response surrounds the point of terminal illness, the hurt and abandonment still echoing in his voice as he relates his experience.

... Three other doctors came in to look at Sadako. One of them shook his head and gently stroked her hair.

By now the rest of Sadako's family was at the hospital. Her parents were in the doctor's office. Sadako could hear the murmur of their voices. Once her mother cried, "Leukemia! But that's impossible!" At the sound of that frightening word Sadako put her hands over her ears. (Coerr, 1977, p. 29)

At this point in our reading Ken interrupts the text, he has been called by ethical concerns. He questions.

Ken: Why did the American's drop the bomb on them anyways?

Curtis: Because it was World War II.

Ken: But why couldn't they just shoot a gun and then it would be over?

Me: Because it hadn't been. They were shooting guns at each other. There were so many people involved—the world was involved which is why it was called World War II. The United States wanted to end the war, they had been negotiating with Japan to end the war but they interpreted what Japan was saying in negotiations as they might continue fighting. So they dropped the bomb on Hiroshima to end the war.

Emily: Because they thought Japan was still going to be fighting.

Ken: Yeah, O.K. but why couldn't Sadako and her family run away at the start of the war?

Emily: They didn't know they were going to drop it.

Curtis: They don't know the atom bomb is going to come from the U.S.A. because they didn't believe the U.S.A. would even do that kind of thing.

Emily: Yeah, they just kept doing their stuff because they didn't know the bomb was coming.

Curtis: And I am from the U.S.A.

Me: We know what happened because that was in the past. But they didn't know that the bomb was going to be dropped because that was in their future.

Ken: Yeah, but if I was in Hiroshima I would just run away.

Me: But where would you go, Ken?

Ken: I would run away to another town.

Me: But the whole country is at war. It is not just the city of Hiroshima it's the entire country of Japan. The bomb not only affected the people in Hiroshima but it affected the towns outside of it, and the farmer's fields...

Emily: Because that's the way bombs...

Ken: All the plants too?

Chris: If they sent a nuclear bomb that would be worse.

Me: The plants too, because when the bomb dropped it was not just contained in one space the radiation spread out like a cloud. It was carried on the winds and by the force of the bomb.

Emily: Like ash from a volcano.

Curtis: A nuclear bomb is worse because a nuclear bomb is filled with atoms and it just splits them, splits everyone of them and it just blows up. It's an even worse explosion.

Ken: But how could they?

The question of why the American's dropped the bomb on Hiroshima is not just Ken's question. It is not just personal. It is an ethical question of the world.

The others hear Ken's question and together they explore their understandings of such an incomprehensible event. Ken's question has made a claim on each member of the group. They have answered the call of his question and have given themselves over to it. They have gathered together around the calling and the claim. They are struggling to understand what they know of the past, how it could have come to be, and what options they would have had had they been in that same situation.

To understand it does not mean primarily to reason one's way back into the past, but to have a present involvement in what is said. It is not really a relationship between persons, between the reader and the author (who is perhaps quite unknown), but about sharing in what the text shares with us. (Gadamer, 1989, p. 391)

As readers they have a substantial involvement in what is being said. Together they are contributing to that involvement. They respond to and explore what Ken has voiced, but the response is communal. They stay with their questions and wonderings. They explore them and further them in conversation. The conversation explores a plurality of issues at once, not a singular, fixed point but everything that surrounds it. They work with and through their issues, they work out their understandings in the presence of the others.

Sadako saw Kenji for the first time. He was nine and small for his age.

Sadako stared at his thin face and shining dark eyes.

"Hello!" she said. "I'm Sadako."

Kenji answered in a low, soft voice. Soon the two were talking like old friends.... "I'll die soon. I have leukemia from the bomb." ...

Back in her room Sadako was thoughtful. She tried to imagine what it would be like to be ill and have no family. Kenji was brave, that's all. She made a big crane out of her prettiest paper and sent it across the hall to his room. Perhaps it would bring him luck.

One day Kenji didn't appear on the porch. Late that night Sadako heard the rumble of a bed being rolled down the hall. Nurse Yasunaga

came in to tell her that Kenji had died. Sadako turned to the wall and let the tears come. (Coerr, 1977, pp. 43-45)

Kevin: The only thing I don't understand is why isn't Sadako and Kenji in a few chapters and then in the next one die. Not just in two pages and then he dies.

Me: Why do you think?

Emily: Because the author wants to do that, I guess.

Me: So you are disagreeing with what the author did?

Ken: Yes.

Emily: It was fast that Kenji died.

Me: Can you do that?

Ken: No.

Emily: Yes.

Curtis: He can do that. It is his story he can do anything.

Me: But you are the reader of the story. Right? Well, the author is actually a lady. So you are the reader of this lady's story. As the reader do you get to decide some things?

Emily: No.

Ken: No.

Me: Not at all? Nothing?

Curtis: You might want to call and tell her that in the next book she might be writing.

Me: You might be able to do that. So Ken can't change what the author wrote but can he disagree with it?

All: Yes.

Emily: But he can't change the story.

Me: But he can disagree and question it. Because he is the reader and as the reader that is one of the things you get to do.

Emily: Usually books have another chapter and then he dies. They talk about it first.

Me: So you disagree with the way Eleanor Coerr made this happen so fast. She introduces Kenji and he dies in the same chapter.

Our reading community is seeking to understand what the roles of the author and the reader are and how these are intertwined. They are exploring their understandings around control of the text, around who and how textual decisions

are made. What are their roles as readers? What kind of integrity does the text have? They are discussing how the text is presented and making judgements about the authorship and the unfolding of the story.

Emily: Maybe she doesn't know what the next chapter is supposed to be called so she only talks about Kenji in one chapter.

Me: When you write a story do you always know what is going to happen next, or exactly what is going to happen at the end of your story?

Curtis: The beginning of the story gives you so many clues about what is going to happen. You have it in your brain.

Me: Do you have the entire story in your brain?

Emily: Sometimes.

Curtis: No.

Ken: Not usually.

Me: Sometimes?

Curtis: You know kind of what is going to happen. Like... say at the end of the story this kid is going to come back alive or he stays in the ground. You know if he is either going to stay in the ground or come back alive. So you kind of know what is maybe going to happen.

Me: So in some stories you have an idea of how they are going to work out. Emily made a point too. You said that you write some of a story...

Emily: And then I think about it some more.

Me: In some of your stories then, you don't always know what is going to happen next. In thinking about what comes next...

Emily: When I think of it all right away I get confused. So I get something and write it down and then I have to leave and think about it for awhile. Then sometimes I write down what is happening and I don't know what is next but then I am writing and it just kind of comes out.

Me: So in some stories one idea makes the next one happen. It is kind of like the story is writing itself.

In conversation the students are beginning to explore an understanding of how writing works itself out in writing, how understanding may be forwarded by the writing itself. Conversing around an understanding of the conversational

aspects of writing. Conversation that plays itself out in the to and fro movement, in the carrying forth of the writing. They have a sense of the hard work involved in writing. Of the “confusion”, of the “sometimes you know”, the losing and finding, the “leaving and thinking”, of the writing being in control of itself and its language. They are beginning to explore their understanding of the ways language works through you, the ways of language, of writing having a life of its own “I am writing and it just kind of comes out.”

As their teacher I am also weaving my authority into these conversations. I am telling them, making points. I am pushing, tugging, questioning, and prompting the children towards an understanding. I take their hands and lead them along the pathway of this terrain, the pathway of the interconnected worlds of reading and writing. “Come with me,” I say as I take them along this terrain, “There is something important here for you to understand.” I am responding to my responsibilities as their teacher. I am teaching.

You cannot withhold yourself if you want to foster the birth of something new. You cannot stand at the sidelines and watch the game, you must become part of its play. You cannot deny the game your playing, anymore than you can deny it the young, for “children embody and keep alive a sense of the play of the world, giving voice to the powers of human regeneration.” (Smith, 1994, p. 162) You cannot simply “behave playfully” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 102), you must participate

wholly in the game. In the game of teaching and reading, you must allow yourself to be absorbed, to be brought forth to meet reading in such a way that both reading and readers are brought into their own.

Sadako Sasaki died on October 25, 1955.

A folded crane club was organized in her honor. Members still place thousands of paper cranes beneath Sadako's statue on August 6—Peace Day. They make a wish, too. Their wish is engraved on the base of the statue:

*This is our cry,
This is our prayer;
peace in the world. (Coerr, 1977, p. 64)*

Ken: I am happy I read this book because I had never heard about the atom bomb. I feel sad that the United States dropped it anyways.

Emily: I feel there should be no more war because it hurts lots of people.

Curtis: This book is trying to teach you something, because it has taught me about fighting because Sadako was a fighter even though she died she never gave up her courage or her hope. So we shouldn't give up our hope either.

Emily: It teaches you that peace is worth fighting for and that kids can do that.

Ken: Kids can because kids can talk about peace and teach other kids that war kills so much.

Me: Peace is our responsibility.

We have gathered around this text and explored its terrain together. It has been an exploration rich in depth, and varied on its pathways. In our explorations the text has called to us and claimed us as its own. Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes is a book we shall remember and be wont to revisit. We have gone

somewhere and to something together and in our journeying we have gained new understandings of ourselves and the world of which we are a part. Our explorations have been occasioned by conversations, conversations in which we have found existence in new ways. We have experienced an “increase in being” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 140). “In the wholeheartedness of concentration, world and self begin to cohere. With that state comes an enlarging: of what may be known, what may be felt, what may be done.” (Hirshfield, 1997, p. 4)

In our gathering we have come together around a text worthy of contemplation, interpretation, and conversation. Our coming together has been a “pulsing [and] potentized field of experience, able to move us even in its stillness.” (Abram, 1996, p. 190) We have come together in an unfolding understanding—a focused and integral understanding. We have come together in an understanding whose richness, whose sensitivity, whose depth emanates from the fact that it is larger than ourselves. In our gathering together we have participated in an exploration of textual terrain which has brought together “earth and sky, divinities and mortals.” (Dreyfus & Spinoza, 1998, p. 7). We have participated in an exploration in which in

“its particular integrity, one feels extraordinarily in tune with all that is happening, a special graceful ease takes over, and events seem to unfold of their own momentum—all combining to make the moment all the more centered and more a gift. A reverential sentiment arises;

one feels thankful or grateful for receiving all that is brought out by this particular situation.” (Dreyfus & Spinoza, 1998, pp. 7-8)

In gathering around Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes we have received a gift—the gift of responsive readings. The memory of this experience is one to which I turn and re-turn. It is a memory that calls me to give dignity to what children, teachers, and texts may become in learning spaces. It is a memory that in Heidegger’s terms is a “shining forth”. (Dreyfus & Spinoza, 1998, p. 8) It is a gift that has been granted. In its granting it calls for a

pedagogy of giftedness, a pedagogy which is guided by care-ful discernment; i.e. discernment which is attentive to small signs of big things. For us as teachers, this requires a tremendous maturity, which implies an authentic freedom on our part to watch over children in a way that is faithful to the full possibilities which are at work in children’s lives. (Smith, 1994, p. 201)

CHAPTER SIX

DWELLING WITH THE GIFT

Catch only what you've thrown yourself, all is
 mere skill and little gain;
 but when you're suddenly the catcher of a ball
 thrown by an eternal partner
 with accurate and measured swing
 towards you, to your center, in an arch
 from the great bridgebuilding of God:
 why catching then becomes a power—
 not yours, a world's.

—Rainer Maria Rilke
 (Gadamer, 1989, epigraph)

In gathering around the gift of responsive readings we “catch a ball thrown by an eternal partner”, and in the catching of the ball we find a “power—not ours but a world's.” We find a power of the world's, the power of reading. In opening the gifts of reading, in responding, in our presence children are “tossing us a ball”. As they receive the gift of reading they bring to us an offering of what the book has given them, of what the world has given them. As young children present and offer forth to us their gifts they are inquiring into whether there is a place to house their offerings, they are inquiring into how we shall live well with their gifts. They present to us an opportunity for stewardship of the gift. The gift, which has been

theirs for a time, becomes ours for a time. The stewardship of this gift carries with it huge and profound responsibilities to the children, to the gift, and to the world.

Responsibilities to shelter, house, care for and further their offerings.

Responsibilities to receive, further, and pass on the gift with ‘accurate and measured swing’. In receiving their gifts we are responsible to help children both “open” their gifts, along with finding and working out their place within the world so that in their turn they too may further the gift.

As with all gifts, the gift of responsive reading “realizes itself, then, not just in self-fulfillment but to the extent that others are drawn into a consideration of its broader, deeper and inner meaning.” (Smith, 1994, p. 205) In gathering around responsive readings with others we become more deeply placed in the world. We do not just make the reading our own, do not fashion and shape the reading in our own willful images, but come to “broader, deeper and inner meaning” in the presence of the world of reading. Inherent in the gift of responsive reading is otherness—other readers, other texts, other conversations. In the presence of something other we become more wholly ourselves. “A true gift brings people together.” (Smith, 1994, p. 204)

In the presence of my mother I was invited to journey in the world of reading. In its invitation I was to find a particular gift—the gift of reading. My mother, with “accurate and measured swing” tossed to me the gift of reading. And in its

“catching” it became part of my “center”, an understanding of reading that is inscribed in who I am. An understanding of reading that retains the traces of my ancestry, that is a living inheritance to which I must attend. As I attend deeply to reading it has become part of my unique purpose, part of an inheritance I am responsible to and for.

In responsibility there is an obligation to work out the truth of reading, to work out where and what we have been and are. In understanding how we have arrived at this responsibility we may decide how it is that we can proceed, how it is that we can try to shape the reading that we pass on, how it is that we can live well in the world. We must take up the difficulties, the hard work, in reading and in the teaching of reading to dwell deeply in it, to gather around it, to allow it to engage others. We must take up our stories as teachers and readers and enter into a conversation with the limitations and possibilities of which they tell. We must take up our stories of reading for what they may read back to us. Our stories may allow us, and others, to deeply meet that *of which* they are fecund, reading. In their capacity to engage others our stories have the potential to “unite us as a human community through opening new possibilities for our own regeneration.” (Smith, 1994, p. 205)

In accepting, dwelling with, furthering and passing on the gift of responsive reading we have “caught a toss from an eternal partner”, one which we need to be

open to receiving again and again. With open arms we gather and are gathered around the power of reading, we receive and pass along its gifts with 'accurate and measured swing' while holding ourselves open to the possibilities of its stories. As stewards we carry it forth reverently and care-fully so that there is a place in the world for its offerings, a place in the world where its stories can go on and on.

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