The Quest for Meaning
Narratives of Teaching, Learning and the Arts
Mary Beattie (Author/Editor)
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, Canada

The Quest for Meaning: Teaching, Learning and the Arts presents a narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy and research in higher education. Through narratives of experience, the book offers revealing, poignant examples of the transformative power of the arts and of narrative inquiry in learners' lives, and of the centrality of story in their ongoing quest for meaning.

The Quest for Meaning will be valuable in a wide range of graduate and undergraduate settings. It provides a framework for the development of new pedagogies which integrate the theory and practice of narrative, arts-based approaches to education. The work makes a contribution to the fields of narrative and arts-based inquiry and pedagogy, qualitative research methods, holistic and integrated studies, and self-directed inquiry. It will appeal to a range of audiences who are interested in this creative, integrative approach to education, and who want to gain insights into how students learn, from their own unique perspectives.

Grounded in Dr. Beattie's interconnected approach to research and pedagogy, the book begins with her own story of teaching, learning, research and the arts. This provides the backdrop to an account of a collaborative pedagogy designed to enable students to conduct in-depth narrative inquiries into their lives, and to learn how to do narrative, arts-based research with others. Here, Beattie provides insights into the practices and processes of solitary and collaborative inquiry, and the interaction and integration that take place within the three kinds of dialogue she proposes: the dialogue with the self, the dialogue with others, and the dialogue between the dialogues.

The book's other twelve narratives show from learners' unique perspectives, how the creation and re-creation of their ways of knowing and being is a distinctively individual process involving all aspects of their humanity. Individually, these narratives provide valuable glimpses into the challenges, the joys, the frustrations and emotionality, and the important personal satisfactions involved in the processes of learning, unlearning and re-learning. In their own voices, these learners tell of the diverse ways in which they became more responsive to their own inner lives, to the perspectives and understandings of others, and to the creation of more meaningful narratives for their current and future lives. Collectively, the narratives highlight the importance of recognizing personal experience in settings of higher education. They also present compelling evidence for acknowledging the significance of inquiry, creativity, imagination, dialogue, interaction, and integration in enabling learners to bring the whole of their being to the learning process, to the exploration of the stories by which they live, and to the creation of new narratives for their future lives.

The Quest for Meaning: Narratives of Teaching, Learning and the Arts is a work of art in itself… Mary Beattie, together with her co-authors show us that embedding the Arts in our learning, teaching and researching is not an option: it is an imperative.

Robyn Ewing, Professor of Teacher Education and the Arts, University of Sydney, Australia.

This book is an important contribution to arts-based research and narrative inquiry and will be welcomed by those working in these fields. It describes a multilayered experience that allows students to share their own stories in creative and engaging ways. The stories told in this book are inspiring and should encourage readers to creatively reflect on their own stories.

John (Jack) Miller, University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada, author of The Holistic Curriculum and Education and the Soul.

The Quest for Meaning: Teaching, Learning and the Arts demonstrates the potential of narrative inquiry to help researchers, teachers, and teacher educators make important connections between teaching, learning, and research. A powerful theme throughout is that of risk-taking, beginning with Mary Beattie herself as she writes with her students. The model of fine arts graduate teacher education presented here makes an important contribution to educational research.

Helen Christiansen, Professor Emerita, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, Canada.
The Quest for Meaning
The Quest for Meaning

Narratives of Teaching, Learning and the Arts

Mary Beattie (Author/Editor)
University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Canada
'The Angel that presided o'er my birth'

The Angel that presided o'er my birth
Said, "Little creature, form'd of Joy and Mirth,
"Go love without the help of any Thing on Earth."
-William Blake
DEDICATION

This book is for J.D.B., my husband and my anam cara.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: A WORD OF THANKS

This book has been two decades in the making. Along the way, I have received encouragement, support and inspiration from many wonderful students, colleagues and research participants in Canada and the United States, Australia and Iceland, and in the United Kingdom and Europe. My ideas have been stimulated and nourished by all the conversations and discussions, and by the work we have done together.

I am especially grateful to my former students whose work is presented throughout the chapters of the book. I owe a deep debt of gratitude to these individuals who have collaborated with me tirelessly through the various drafts, and who have consistently shown the depth of their scholarship and soulfulness, and their commitment to the book. It is their narratives that make the book sing. I want to express a special thanks to those who also provided thoughtful responses to the drafts of my chapters from their valuable perspectives as writers, scholars and former participants in my classes.

In addition, I want to thank Nancy Dawe, Laura Hegge and Robert Lompart for permission to include their work in my chapters. I want to express my deep gratitude to Winifred Hunsburger and Bob Phillips. In addition to these individuals’ other contributions to the book, Winifred also co-ordinated the references, and Bob created the original artwork on the front cover.

My understandings of the connections between the arts, education, and research are continually expanded in the context of my relationships with colleagues, friends, and my current research participants, who inspire and support my ongoing explorations. I wish to express my deep gratitude to my long-time friend, Art Young for the many conversations about literature, poetry and music we have had since we first met as Masters students of English Literature. I also want to thank Art for his invaluable professional editing and proofreading expertise. I owe much gratitude to my sister, Geraldine East who loves the arts as much as I do, and who has stimulated my thinking throughout the years. Also, to Annie Blampied, Sheila Cook, Diana Cooper, Christine Crombie, Dorothy Cameron, Virginia Dawson, Nancy Desjardins, Darrell Dobson, Thomas Fleming, Laura Hegge, Lesley Holland, David Hunt, Hafdis Ingvarsdottir, Lilja Jonsdottir, Robert London, Tom Malloy, Joan Medina, Carol Munro, Philip Thatcher, Brenda Tvrdy, Lee Willingham, and Alan Wilson, I say a heartfelt thank you.

I am grateful to Peter de Liefde and the people at Sense Publishers for providing the valuable support to make this book a reality, and for their innovative approach to academic publishing. I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Tom Barone, University of Arizona; Helen Christenson, University of Regina, Robyn Cusworth, University of Sydney, and Jack Miller, University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, who agreed to read the final manuscript and to write a response.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: A WORD OF THANKS

My husband Jim has provided support for this book in his usual generous, thoughtful and loving way. He dealt with the challenges of preparing the final manuscript, and shared my enthusiasm for the book since its inception. His contributions infuse every page.

Mary Beattie
University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,
Toronto, Canada.
June, 2009.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: A WORD OF THANKS** ........................................ix

**Part One: Choosing a Story to Live By: Connecting the Past, Present and Future of Our Lives**

Prologue: *Mary Beattie* ...........................................................................................................3

Chapter 1: The Ongoing Quest for Meaning: Only Connect: *Mary Beattie* ..............................11

Chapter 2: A Narrative, Arts-Based Pedagogy: Connecting the Personal, Professional and Scholarly: *Mary Beattie* ..............................29

**Part Two: The Dialogue with the Self: Connecting Insight and Imagination**

Chapter 3: Beginning with Myself: The Power of Music: A Reflection, Renewal and Transformation by Michelle Pereira: *Michelle Pereira* .......................................................75

Chapter 4: Dancing through Life, One Story at a Time: *Melanie Markin* ...............................93

Chapter 5: The Power of Stories: Tracing the Creative Thread and Healing the Self Whole: *Carly Stasko* .........................................................107

Chapter 6: Being Seen: *Bob Phillips* .................................................................................119

**Part Three: The Dialogue with Others: Hearing New Voices, Perspectives and Interpretations**

Chapter 7: Between the Laments and the Lullabies: *Angélique Davies* ....................................137

Chapter 8: Autobiography as Genesis: Linking the Student, Writer and Teacher in us all: *Carol Lipszyc* .................................................................149

Chapter 9: One Lens: The Role of the Arts: Beginning with Myself: *Catherine Dowling* ..................161

Chapter 10: Learning from my Experiences: The Role of the Arts: *Masayuki Hachiya* ....................173

**Part Four: The Dialogue Between the Dialogues: Creating a New Narrative through Interaction and Integration**

Chapter 11: A Recursive Path: *Winifred Hunsburger* ...........................................187

Chapter 12: The Artful Body: A Narrative of an Embodied Relationship with the Arts: *Rae Johnson* .................................................................199

Chapter 13: Voices: *Benjamin Bolden* ...........................................................................215

Chapter 14: Hearing My Voice While Listening to the Choir: *Carole Richardson* .......................233

**Author Biographies** ..................................................................................................251
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: A WORD OF THANKS

Epilogue: Mary Beattie .................................................................257
Appendix 1 ....................................................................................259
Appendix 2 ....................................................................................261
References ..................................................................................265
PART ONE: CHOOSING A STORY TO LIVE BY: CONNECTING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF OUR LIVES

Prologue: Mary Beattie
- Chapter 1: The Ongoing Quest for Meaning: Only Connect: Mary Beattie
- Chapter 2: A Narrative, Arts-Based Pedagogy: Connecting the Personal, Professional and Scholarly: Mary Beattie
MARY BEATTIE

PROLOGUE

I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough,
Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades
Forever and forever when I move.

(Tennyson, 1972, Ulysses, p. 645)

This book is both an ending and a beginning: an ending in that it makes significant connections between my lifelong interests in the arts and education; a beginning in that it provides an account of a pedagogy which is focussed on helping students to gain awareness of how their lives have been created in the past, on choosing how they will be influenced and conditioned in the present, and on creating more connected, integrated, meaningful narratives for their future lives. It is also focussed on helping students to learn about narrative, arts-based approaches to research. In this approach to pedagogy, students are encouraged to take full advantage of the learning relationships and collaborative learning community which are an integral part of this approach. They explore the meanings which they ascribe to their lived experiences, examine the stories which they are living out in their lives, and create new narratives for their future lives.

As a child growing up in a small village in the west of Ireland in the 50’s, I loved the stories, the music and the songs that surrounded me in my everyday life. This early love affair led me to further studies in literature and music, a career in teaching and in narrative, arts-based research. The origins of this book lie in my explorations of the extent to which this early love of stories and the arts has shaped my ways of knowing and being. It is also grounded in my efforts to make better connections between the arts and education, and to use the transformative and uniting power of the arts to develop a collaborative pedagogy for graduate and undergraduate education.

The interconnected experiences, dialogues and assignments of a narrative, arts-based pedagogy provide students with a unique framework for inquiry, for the creation and re-creation of knowledge and for the creation of new narratives. This relational and collaborative approach to pedagogy is grounded in the understanding that one of our most human characteristics is that we are story-telling, meaning-seeking beings, who make sense of our experiences through narrative ways of thinking. Through inquiry, dialogue and interaction, we engage in the exploration of the stories that have formed us, in the stories beneath the surface of those stories, and learn to create and re-create new narratives for our lives. This process of
creating and recreating our identities is one of continuous exploration, and of reconstructing and re-forming the existing patterns of our lives into new configurations in the light of new insights, understandings and of the ever-changing circumstances around us.

One way or another, in our personal and professional lives and in our educational contexts, we all live by the stories we have inherited from our families, societies, and cultures, and those other stories that consciously or unconsciously, we have picked up along the way. These stories have made us who we are. They are what we use to interpret and understand our experiences, and to imagine and plan our future lives. As we live our daily lives, we make decisions and choices by interpreting them in the context of the past we have experienced and the future we imagine. When we explore the stories that have formed us, we learn how they have shaped our ways of thinking, and our ways of knowing and being. We also learn that we can choose the stories we live out in our lives, we can be the authors of our own destinies, and can create future narratives which will enable us to lead more connected, integrated and meaningful lives. When we change the stories by which we live, we can change our lives.

Approaches to graduate and undergraduate education do not often acknowledge the centrality of stories, of creativity and imagination, or the importance of helping students to make meaningful connections between the personal, professional and scholarly aspects of their lives. In a narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy, the importance of these is acknowledged and fostered through inquiry, dialogue, interaction and integration. In Chapter Two, A Narrative, Arts-Based Pedagogy: Making Connections Between the Personal, Professional and Scholarly, I provide an account of this pedagogy in the context of a particular course in graduate education, Research and Inquiry in the Arts, which I have taught for over a decade at the University of Toronto/Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Within this inquiry-based approach to learning, students learn to think narratively, to explore the meanings they ascribe to their lived experiences, and to conduct narrative, arts-based research. As they do so, they gain new insights into how their understandings have been created through the dialogues they have with themselves, and within relationships with others where “lives meet lives”, and in which they:

...interact and inform one another, influencing and changing one another in the process as the energies of each are harnessed in the service of the other, and new possibilities, relations and forms are created. (Beattie, 1995a, p.143)

Students develop an appreciation for how the solitary, collaborative and integrative processes of the dialogues which are an integral aspect of this pedagogy enable them to:

...tell stories of their lived experiences, past and present, and to learn to tell and re-tell, enact and re-enact the stories through which each individual is made and re-made, told and re-told. (Eisner, in Beattie, 1995a, p. ix)

They conduct self directed narrative inquiries into the meaning of the stories that formed them, into their learning experiences in the arts, and explore the ways in
which the various art forms have been a source of inspiration, clarity and meaning-making in their lives. Within the framework provided by the three kinds of dialogue of the course—the dialogue with the self, the dialogue with others, and the dialogue between the dialogues—students explore the central concerns that give their lives unity and purpose, and create and recreate not only their knowledge and understandings, but also create and re-create themselves. As they gain new insights into the ways in which the different forms of thinking they have experienced through the arts have allowed them to create different forms of meaning, they also begin to appreciate the distinctive ways in which the arts have enabled them to think, feel, see, and imagine new ways of knowing and being. When they gain fuller understandings of how the stories they are living out in their lives have been shaped and conditioned by their prior experiences, this enables them to better understand how they can create new narratives for their future lives in which they can live in more connected, integrated and meaningful ways. Drawing on an expanded conception of “interacting narratives” which also encompasses “the literary, aesthetic, ecological, and secular-spiritual forms which individuals choose for their influencing and conditioning effects” (Beattie, 2001-ongoing), students learn how to take increased ownership of their learning, and to plan and direct the course of their development as whole human beings. They learn to:

Create contexts for contemplation and creativity in their lives, for the creation and re-creation of new knowledge, and for the continuous creation and re-creation of the self. (Beattie, 2001-ongoing)

It is only when students take full ownership for their learning that they bring themselves wholeheartedly to the inquiry process, to the reconstruction of what they know, and to the creation of the stories for their future lives. It is only when they bring their imaginations, intuition, and creativity as well as their intellects to the real questions of their lives, that they discover the joys and satisfactions as well as the challenges of making new and more meaningful connections between the personal, professional and scholarly aspects of those lives. When they bring the whole of their humanity (including the awareness of their distinctive ways of knowing) to their scholarly work and future research, students learn that they have choices in how they can represent their meanings, and can do so in ways that are personally satisfying, and which also have the potential to provide others with experiences in which to deepen their understandings and to construct new meanings.

Throughout the chapters of the book, the various authors provide accounts of their unique inquiries and quests for coherence, connectedness, and meaning in their lives. Their narratives show the extent to which the creation of a personally meaningful life is a distinctly individual process which is grounded in each individual’s past, and in his or her imagined future. Written in their own distinctive language and voices, the narratives show the ways in which the solitary and collaborative dialogues have provided a framework for exploring the complexities of their learning in the context of graduate education, for addressing some of the significant questions in their lives, and for making new connections between the personal, professional and scholarly aspects of their lives. They also show how a
pedagogy which acknowledges the centrality of stories, and recognizes the interconnectedness of all aspects of their humanity, has helped them to come to new understandings of themselves, and of the professional practices, and research methods and forms which will foster new kinds of meaning-making, and new ways of living and being for themselves and others.

The narratives are grouped according to how the different kinds of dialogue which are an integral aspect of a narrative and arts-based pedagogy, have provided a framework in which these authors have come to understand their processes of learning, unlearning and re-learning, and of where they have come from, what they care about, and of what they might become. In each of the sections of the book, the narratives show how the solitary, collaborative and interactive frameworks provided by the dialogues have created contexts for contemplation and reflection, for the interaction of narratives, and for integration, synthesis, and creation. They also illustrate how they have enabled these learners to determine what is significant and meaningful in their lives, to explore the influence of the past, present and imagined future on their interpretation of current realities and events, and to work on the reconciliation of opposites and on the discordant qualities of their lives. In their own voices and language, the authors of these narratives describe their meaning-making processes and the development of their truths and understandings in ways that are not possible in the expository prose of traditional research reports. In doing so, they provide us with insights into the values and impulses that animate their lives, and which illuminate the unique ways in which each individual has engaged in inquiry and in the creation of a new narrative for his or her future life. As a result, their narratives deepen our comprehension, and they advance our understandings.

The Origins of the Book

The book began over two decades ago in a strongly felt desire to create a pedagogy for graduate and undergraduate education where students would willingly engage in their own self directed inquiries, in collaborative relationships, in dialogue, and in making increasingly more significant connections between the various aspects of their lives. This desire now finds fruition in the chapter entitled, A Narrative, Arts-Based Pedagogy: Making Connections between the Personal, Professional and Scholarly. The chapter began with the informal documentation of my ongoing efforts to create this kind of pedagogy by making more significant connections between education and the arts, and by designing a range of activities and assignments which would focus on the development of the whole person. I kept track of my efforts through reflective writing, and in the description and interpretation of the difficulties as well as the successes of creating the kinds of relationships and dialogues where students would document the details of interacting with their own inner lives, their interactions with each other, and the integration of their understandings in a written narrative. My understandings developed through my intermittent but unremitting attempts to draw my emergent understandings together into a coherent whole. The chapter as it appears now has gone through numerous
cycles of writing and rewriting over the years. As it began to take shape, I realized that I needed to dig deeper by exploring the stories beneath the surface of the stories in a chapter which would precede it. In the later stages of the writing of these two chapters, I invited the other authors in the book to respond to them, and to give me feedback from their unique perspectives as writer/readers, and also as former students of the course I was writing about.

The original versions of the narratives in the book were written in the context of a narrative and arts-based approach to pedagogy which I have described here as it is enacted in the context of one of the graduate courses I teach, Research and Inquiry in the Arts. As the idea for the book took hold, I made a note of those narratives written in the context of this course, where an individual’s quest for meaning was also concerned with a quest for quality in narrative, arts-based research. Over the years, I invited the authors of these narratives to collaborate with me in the additional cycles of writing, responding, and rewriting necessary to produce the narratives for this book. This work also included writing a new introduction, the addition of an afterword, and the elimination of the review of the literature and the methodology sections of the original narratives that had been written for the course. Some authors chose to represent their original narratives in entirely new ways, and others stayed close to the format of the original versions they wrote in the course. The process of writing the chapters gave these authors the opportunity to reflect back on the cycles of their inquiry and on the importance of writing and rewriting as part of that inquiry. The collaborative relationships we had established in the context of the course allowed us to carry on from where we had left off, sometimes many years earlier, to journey together again, and to acknowledge once more:

...the ambiguity of journeying backwards in order to move forwards, and to know that all our beginnings hold within them the seeds of their endings, which in themselves hold the seeds of new beginnings. (Beattie, 1995a, p. 1)

I have included the questions which guided the various cycles of our individual inquiries, and the writing and rewriting of all the narratives in the book, in Appendix 1. The components of the course and the core readings are outlined in Appendix 2.

The Purpose of the Book: Connecting Teaching, Learning, and the Arts.

The importance of literature, stories, poetry, music, art and creativity in our lives has long been recognized by philosophers, poets and novelists who have told us that we can create the kinds of stories for our current and future lives that allow us to be and become the persons we want to be. Oscar Wilde once explained, that “the important thing about art is not what you get out of it, but what you become because of it”, D. H. Lawrence said, “It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that directs the flow of our lives”, and the German poet, Goethe, tells us that “we are shaped and fashioned by what we love.”
The Irish poet, Seamus Heaney (1988) explains it this way:

Here is the great paradox of poetry and the imaginative arts in general. Faced with the brutality of the historical onslaught, they are practically useless. Yet they verify our singularity, they strike and stake out the ore of self which lies at the base of every individuated life. In one sense the efficacy of poetry is nil—no lyric has ever stopped a tank. In another sense, it is unlimited. It is like the writing in sand in the face of which accusers and accused are left speechless and renewed......Poetry, like the writing is arbitrary and marks time in every possible sense of that phrase......Poetry is more a threshold than a path, one constantly approached and constantly departed from, at which reader and writer undergo in their different ways the experience of being at the same time summoned and released. (Heaney, 1988, p. 107/108)

In today’s world, contemporary neuroscientists working with the concept of brain plasticity, explain that we can change the structure of our brains and can also choose the ways in which we want to be changed and transformed, by the strategic choice of our activities, experiences, thoughts and interactions. (Doidge, 2007). These neuroscientists also tell us that the brain changes its very structure with each different activity it performs, and that it perfects its circuits so that it is better suited to the task at hand. Therefore, the choices we make in our personal, professional and scholarly lives cannot be underestimated, as these choices affect not only the structure and function of our brains, but the development of our skills, sensibilities, ways of knowing and being, and our development as whole human beings.

The idea that the brain can change its own structure and function through thought and activity is, I believe, the most important alteration in our view of the brain since we first sketched out its basic anatomy and the workings of its basic component, the neuron. Like all revolutions this one will have profound effects...The neuroplastic revolution has implications for, among other things, our understanding of how love, sex, grief, relationships, learning, addictions, culture, technology, and psychotherapies change our brains. All of the humanities, social sciences, and physical sciences, insofar as they deal with human nature, are affected, as are all forms of training. All of these disciplines will have to come to terms with the fact of the self-changing brain and with the realization that the architecture of the brain differs from one person to the next and that it changes in the course of our individual lives. (Doidge, 2007, p. xx)

The creation of this book has been a labour of love in many ways. It has enabled me to confer order on my thoughts about a pedagogy which I believe can help learners to develop their voices, to recognize that they have choices regarding how they think and in what they do, and to take ownership and authority for the creation of narratives for their future lives where they can live with increased integrity, congruence and authenticity. I have struggled with the difficulties of doing this with each new group of students, and the stories of the failed attempts and disappointments would provide the material for another book. I have also struggled
with describing this way of being in a teaching-learning relationship, and especially the ways of creating a collaborative relationship with each student, and a learning community where students learn from and with each other as well as from and with me. The difficulties linger, as it is almost impossible to describe these ways of being present in relationships with students, and of creating a community where all individuals can be present to each other. In the presence of a teacher and colleagues who are successfully present as co-researchers and soul friends, students will feel the warmth and care in every action and word that will allow them to be themselves without artifice, to show themselves as they really are, to be vulnerable and unafraid, and to open themselves to all the opportunities to learn, unlearn and re-learn through the interaction of their narratives.

In the processes of writing and rewriting the narratives for the book, the collaborative relationships I had with these students were re-established from where we had left them in the context of the formal education setting. As a teacher, I found it both encouraging and inspiring to see how the initial inquiry in which these students had engaged in the context of the course, and the habits of reflection, interpretation and continuous meaning-making they had learned in their graduate studies programme, had stayed with them. I also found it inspiring to see how the subsequent cycles of writing, feedback and rewriting for the book chapters had helped them to reconstruct their visions, and to adapt, redefine and respond to the changing circumstances of their lives in personally meaningful and satisfying ways. These processes allowed me to see with greater confidence how this approach to pedagogy provides educators in graduate and undergraduate programmes with ways to engage their own students in these kinds of experiences, interactions, and assignments in their own educational settings, to improvise and play with them, and to adapt them according to their own unique situations.

This book is one that I would have found valuable as a new professor in education, and as a graduate and undergraduate student who has always needed stories to understand the complexities, the wonders and the mysteries of life, of learning and teaching, and of learning to do research. My hope is that the different voices you hear throughout the book, will encourage you to fall in love with your own questions, and to engage in your own quest for meaning with imagination, courage and creativity. Your search for greater clarity, cohesiveness and integration will involve you in changes in your knowledge and understandings, and in the inevitable movement towards the ever shifting horizons of a destination that is undefined and only gradually emergent. I hope that you will find inspiration, hope and support in our attempts to compose lives that are personally meaningful to us, and which describe our attempts to refocus, redefine and to improvise as our circumstances have changed. I hope that you will create a narrative for your future life which in the words of the poet Seamus Heaney, will make your ‘hopes and history rhyme’.
1. THE ONGOING QUEST FOR MEANING: ONLY CONNECT

SOUL TIME

Sometime in your lifetime
take a walk along a sandy shore
when the waves are high
and the tide is rolling in.

As the sea tries to claim you,
let your blood pulse to the ocean beat.

Let it take you down
into the warm
and waiting arms
of your lonely, welcoming soul.

(M. B. 2009)

In this chapter, I tell the stories that lie under the surface of the story of the development of a narrative, arts-based orientation to pedagogy. In this approach to pedagogy, it is important that we all tell and re-tell the stories of ourselves, and acknowledge that each telling is a temporal one which will be re-told in the light of new insights and understandings. For teachers and students alike, this process of creating a life is an ongoing, creative, never-ending quest, where we make new connections through dialogue with ourselves and others, and through the processes of integration and re-creation, where we continually transform what we know, and transform ourselves.

I have outlined the principal features of this pedagogy before I journey back through the cycles of stories which show how it has been developed through my own ongoing inquiry and quest for meaning. I believe that this approach to pedagogy is distinctive in that it provides students with a unique framework for inquiry, for receiving feedback from a variety of others, and for integrating what they know in the creation of a narrative. It also provides students with a range of experiences and relationships within which they learn to come to research narratively, to conduct self-study research, and to do narrative, arts-based research with others. This narrative, arts-based pedagogy has five distinctive features:
It is grounded in inquiry, dialogue, self-study research and the writing of an educational narrative, through which students not only create and re-create what they know, but also create and re-create themselves.

Collaborative relationships and a supportive learning community are vitally important aspects to this approach to learning and teaching.

Teachers and students are committed to staying connected to the source of their creativity, intuition and inspiration as well as to their intellectual lives.

The interconnectedness of the past, present and future of individuals’ lives is recognized, as is the interconnectedness of all aspects of their being—intellectual, social, physical, emotional, aesthetic, moral, spiritual.

Education is understood as the process of becoming more human and of making increasingly more sophisticated meanings and connections—between all aspects of the self, between self and others, between the personal, professional and scholarly dimensions of one’s life, between self and society, and between the self and the universe.

Stay close to the source of creativity and inspiration

As I was writing the chapter on this narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy for this book, I was invited to give a talk to a group of educators on this orientation to teaching and learning in graduate and undergraduate education. I wanted to begin my talk with a statement about how important it is for teachers at all levels of education to be connected to the source of their creativity and imaginations as well as to their intellectual lives, and to be involved in the ongoing development of all aspects of themselves as human beings. In doing so, I was keen to emphasize how critical it is for teachers to be engaged in ongoing inquiry, to be connected to what they love, to appreciate and value the questions that emerge in their personal and professional lives, and to do in their own lives what they expect and hope that students will do in theirs. I wanted to show how strongly I believe that for teachers and students alike, staying close to our creativity and imagination allows us to plumb the depths of our experience, enables us to stay in touch with the desires that animate and move us, and helps us to continually find our way home to ourselves.

In preparation for this talk, I wrote an early version of the lines at the beginning of this chapter and I began by reading these lines aloud.

Reading the rough and unfinished draft of the poem to the group allowed me to introduce my talk about a pedagogy which is centrally focused on helping students to explore the landscape of their inner lives, to make connections between the inner and external dimensions of their lives, and to create more meaningful, connected stories for their future lives. I explained that it had come about as a result of the quiet observation of my inner feelings and images, and my persistence in staying connected to the source of my creativity—my spirit, soul, energy, or what Bernard Shaw calls my ‘life force’. As the words and lines began to cohere, I felt as if I had managed to get a firm hold on the lifeline that connects me to that place inside where images and feelings are alive and vibrant. The joy of having made something stayed with me all week, and I felt that I had brought some of my inner music out
THE ONGOING QUEST FOR MEANING

into the external world. Continuing to play with the lines, I was able to remember
the rhythm of the waves in my blood, recall the sensual quality of the solitary time
I had experienced, and inhabit the wonderful feeling of coming home to myself. It
was several weeks later that I became more fully aware of the connection between
the image of the ocean and the landscape of the inner life, both with their
unfathomable depths, allurements and fears, and to recognize my attraction to the
capacity of both to engulf and overwhelm and also to energize, delight and inspire.

I explained to the group that in a narrative and arts-based approach to pedagogy,
continuous inquiry and a creative engagement with life is as relevant and necessary
for teachers as it is for students. Imagination and creativity are essential to the
ongoing development of our abilities to create images of the possible that help us
to see the actual in new ways, and to create something beyond it. The development
of our powers of observation, interpretation and meaning-making, and the
strengthening of the bonds between the senses, the imagination and intellect, are important aspects of developing ourselves as whole human beings.

Through continuous inquiry and a strong connection to the source of our creativity,
we can engage in the explorations that take us into the past that still flows all
around us, and in making connections between this living past, and the new ideas,
new impressions, and new experiences which we have in the present. These
processes allow us to acknowledge our uniqueness as whole human beings, and the
interconnectedness of our intellects, emotions, morals, creativity, values, purposes
and passions. For teachers and for students, the acknowledgement of all these
aspects of our humanity in our learning communities allows us to keep our
individual questions and preoccupations, our hopes and our dreams, vibrant and
alive. It allows us to recognize them as valuable and integral aspects of our
learning and teaching, of our personal, professional and scholarly selves, and of the
processes of constructing and re-constructing the narratives for our future lives.

*Connecting Education and the Arts: Exploring our Stories*

Literature is the domain where story belongs. In good literature a story is
always working on several levels at once; it holds within it a suggestiveness
of the other stories that it is not; it has an irony and ambivalence about its
own identity and posture and immunizes itself against take-over by any
definitive reading or interpretation. From this perspective, it seems that much
of what passes for story in contemporary spirituality and psychology is more
reminiscent of tabloid pastiche than real story. Even the pre-literate tradition
of oral culture had complex tapestries of story that left the most subtle
openings into the resonance fields of myth and mystery.

A human life is the most complex narrative of all; it has many layers of
events which embrace outside behaviour and actions, the inner stream of the
mind, the underworld of the unconscious, the soul, fantasy, dream and
imagination. There is no account of a life which can ever mirror or tell all
of this. When telling her story all a person can offer is a sample of this
complexity. The best stories suggest what they cannot name or describe. They deepen respect for the mystery of events through which identity unfolds...

Since story is now widely used in psychology, spirituality and sociology, a deepening of the mystery of what a story is would serve to illuminate the beauty that dwells deep in the individual life. As the Jewish writer and human rights campaigner Elie Wiesel once said, God created man because he loves stories. (O’Donohue, 2003, pp. 137/138).

In a narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy, the centrality of story and the arts is acknowledged. Through literature, stories and the various art forms, I have been reminded continually of the wholeness of my life, the interconnectedness of its various aspects, and of my connectedness to others and to all things. The arts show us that in all human lives, in nature, in organic systems and in the universe, things are not fragmented and separate, but interconnected and whole. They show us that our intellects are not separate from our emotions, imaginations, our bodies, or our self-image; they enable us to see the corners of our lives illuminated, and to gain access to the conscious and unconscious aspects of our beings. The various art forms allow us to inhabit the feeling of what it is like to be human in any time and place, and to experience things vicariously. They provide us with experiences within which we gain insights into the secret places and the mysteries of the lives of others, as well as our own, to imagine lives that are different to ours, and to make connections to those who are different to ourselves. They teach us to acknowledge that our understandings, values, and ways of knowing and being are not universally shared, to respect and value others’ ways of knowing and being, to feel compassion and empathy towards them, and to understand them as they understand themselves.

Through my experiences in the arts, I have learned that it is only when we bring our whole selves, our feelings as well as our thoughts, to our experiences and interactions, that we gain the insights, and make the kinds of meanings which enable us to develop as whole human beings. We need to engage all aspects of ourselves in our efforts to become more wide awake to the various dimensions of ourselves as human beings, to the processes of making connections between ourselves and others, and between ourselves and that which is larger than ourselves. Through my experiences in the arts, I have learned significant lessons about some of the ways in which to inhabit my life with greater integrity, coherence and authenticity, interact with others in ways where I can be true to them and also to myself, and in which I can make new understandings and meanings.

The desire to develop a pedagogy with strong connections between the arts and education led me to design ways to use the arts to illustrate the ways in which all human beings lead storied lives, and in which they tell stories of those lives to themselves and to others. Narrative and arts-based research texts have helped me to illustrate the ways in which inquirers have studied their own and others’ experience in systematic ways, and have written narratives that show the meanings that they ascribe to their experiences and their lives. Self study research and narrative inquiry allow us to study our own experience by exploring the stories we tell and the stories under the surface of those stories, to create new understandings and new knowledge with which to create stories for our future lives. They allow us to use
arts-based ways of researching and writing our narratives, of integrating the meanings we ascribe to our lived experiences, and of furnishing ourselves with the various choices and possibilities available to us. Our stories are all we have as we deal with the complexities, the changing circumstances and surprising turns that our lives take; they are what we use to create new stories for our future lives. As Caroline Heilbrun (1988) explains:

We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives. (Heilbrun, 1988, p. 37)

Our stories are all we have as we engage in our quests for meaning, and in the creation and re-creation of our identities throughout our lives. In her inspiring book, Composing a Life, Mary Catherine Bateson (1989) explains that the creation of an identity and a meaningful life is a process of ongoing self-invention. She explains:

...we are engaged in the day-to-day process of self-invention—not discovery, for what we search for does not exist until we find it—both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual. (p. 28)

Using a framework of comparative biography for her inquiry into the processes of creating a life, she studied individuals who have complex lives, and whose energies are not narrowly focussed towards a single goal, but are continually refocussed and redefined. Bateson explains that the real challenge in creating a personally meaningful life comes from the realization of multiple alternatives, and the invention of new models, given that there are no singular models, but only resources for creative imaginations. For Bateson, certainty is not a goal. She emphasizes the acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty in the ongoing, unpredictable, shifting processes of learning, unlearning and relearning. She also suggests that the central task of education is to teach us to be creative, adaptable and open to possibilities, to meet difference and diversity with respect, and to allow them to challenge our assumptions, values and beliefs, so that we can adapt and modify what we know, and expand our visions of who we might become, and of what might be.

Composing a life involves an openness to possibilities and the capacity to put them together in a way that is structurally sound...there is a possibility that the real winners in a rapidly changing world will be those who are open to alternatives and able to respect and value those who are different. These winners will not require that others become losers. The change goes on, and surely the central task of education today is not to confirm what is but to equip young men and women to meet that change and to imagine what could be, recognizing the value in what they encounter and steadily working it into their lives and visions. (Bateson, 1989, p. 74)
Bateson explains that the process of composing a life is a creative, improvisational, and life-long process which involves continuous adaptation, interaction and response, the identification of multiple alternatives, and of imagining new ways of doing and being.

Because we are engaged in the day by day process of self-invention—not discovery, for what we search for does not exist until we find it—both the past and the future are raw material, shaped and reshaped by each individual...a continual reimagining of the future and reinterpretation of the past to give meaning to the present, remembering best those events that prefigured what followed, forgetting those that proved to have no meaning within the narrative. (pp. 28–30)

Exploring the Stories Beneath the Surface of the Stories: Creating the Connections

The story of how I came to be the teacher I am has its origins in my love of the arts, of learning, and of teaching. My work as a narrative, arts-based researcher and teacher has allowed me to acknowledge the importance of story, personal experience, creativity, context, historicity, interpretation, inquiry, interaction, integration, relationships, connectedness, temporality, and of the aesthetic and spiritual in everyday life. I have used narrative as a philosophical foundation in which to understand the meanings of the phenomena I have studied, and have also used narrative methods to represent the findings of the research. In this work, I have used story, poetry, accounts of practice, portraits, and dialogue to evoke individuals’ lived experiences of learning, unlearning and re-learning, and to reveal the qualities and complexities of teaching and learning in ways that would not be possible with the expository prose of standard research reports.

My decision to become a teacher at the end of my schooling was quite straightforward, as I had wanted to be a teacher for as long as I could remember. When I envisioned myself as a teacher, I had an image of a life being spent among young people, where I would have literature and music in my daily life, and a lifetime of opportunities to help my students in the way that my best teachers had helped me. The exploration of the origins of that image and of the influences of story, music and literature in my life takes me back to a childhood in the west of Ireland, where I was surrounded by an everyday culture that was rich in music and story. I was also surrounded by a rugged limestone landscape of great natural beauty, and by the timeless stories of the people who had inhabited that place. My childhood’s chief storytellers were my parents, teachers, relatives and friends, and my early abilities were nurtured at home and in school. I delighted in the great variety of stories around me—Celtic and Norse myths and legends, stories of Vikings and fairies, ghosts and saints, of ancient Greece and Rome, and especially the stories that were told in poems and songs. Literature was never mentioned, but stories and poetry and music were everywhere, in English, and in the Gaelic language which had its own distinctive beauty, music and rhythms.
Looking back I now understand that it was through my experiences with stories and song that I learned about myself and the world around me, and created an identity where I understood myself as a ‘maker of things’. Stories, poetry and song had the power to transport me imaginatively to new worlds, to open up new realities and new possibilities, and to nurture my desire for a creative engagement with life. They allowed me to better understand my own experiences and those of others, by helping me to step outside my own perspective and ways of knowing, to feel what others feel, and to imagine what it is like to be someone other than myself. They also taught me to be attentive to the language, the patterns, and rhythms that provide insights into the hidden worlds of others, and to learn to listen and to hear.

At an early age, I learned the importance of paying close attention to sound and tone, of noticing the patterns and meanings above and below the words, and of listening into the spaces and the silences. I am consciously aware of continuing to keep my ear tuned to the different voices and sounds around me, to the various kinds of language we use across the disciplines, and to the development of my abilities to understand things from the perspectives of others.

I have come to recognize that it is from literature and the arts, and especially from Celtic myths and legends, that I inherited the idea of a world where all things are interconnected, and where divinity is in our everyday experiences and interactions if only we can be aware of it. In this way of understanding the meaning of things, there is no separation of the visible and the invisible, of the past, present and future, the mind, body and spirit, of humans from nature, or of a people from the places they inhabit, and the stories and the cultures they inherit. The Irish philosopher poet, John O’Donohue (1997) explained in his book, *Anam Cara*, that the wisdom of the Celtic imagination was neither discursive nor systematic. It did not contain the dualism which separates the visible from the invisible, time from eternity, the human from the divine. The Celts found divinity all around them, in the rivers and hills, the sea and sky and in every kind of animal. As O’Donohue explained, it is a vibrant legacy of mystical wisdom that is unique in the western world.

In my everyday life, I recognize the need to stay closely connected to nature, and to literature, poetry and music, knowing that they provide me with ways to stay connected to myself. They allow me to recognize that the power of life comes from within, as time after time my spirit plunges into the unknown and returns renewed. Tennyson explained this longing for a creative engagement with life to me when I first read his poem *Ulysses*, many years ago. He explained this felt longing for creativity and imagination as well as for intellectual engagement, as the desire to “drink life to the lees”, to “roam with a hungry heart”, and for the “grey spirit” of his soul:

.....yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
(Tennyson, 1972, Ulysses, p. 645)
I have recognized the attraction of poetry, stories, music and literature for as long as I can remember. At an earlier time in my life I tried to explain the meaning of this attraction, the reason for its continuity in my life, and explained:

My choice of literature to read is often connected to the questions I am dealing with in my life, and it is here that I not only find the answers to my questions, but where I also find the seeds of new questions. (Beattie, 1995a, p. 14)

The attraction continues for all these reasons, and also because my experiences in the arts help me to consider the story that I am living out in my life and work, and to ask the questions about what it serves, as well as what it is. The love of the quest and of the questions continues, and experiences in the arts allow me to explore the gaps between the story I tell, and the one I observe myself living, and in making the connections between these. They also provide me with the kinds of experiences that only an aesthetic and creative engagement with life can bring.

Education as a Process of Becoming More Human

It is from literature, poetry and the arts that I learned that education is a process of becoming more human. Through the arts I have been allowed to understand the learning, unlearning and re-learning experiences of others, to see inside their minds, and to see how they have given meaning to their experiences and their lives. I have been allowed to see how they have learned (or not learned) from their lived experiences, and have developed (or not developed) themselves as whole human beings. Through the various arts, I have gained insights into how individuals have addressed the significant questions of their lives, have adapted and modified what they know, learned to respond to unforeseen situations, and to imagine the persons they might become. They have shown me the details of individuals’ quests for meaning, connectedness and coherence in their lives, how they make connections between the intellectual, emotional, social, moral, spiritual, physical and aesthetic aspects of themselves, and between the truths and authenticity of their inner worlds and their actions and work in the external world. As we read about the lives of others, we can choose to make connections to the mythology of our own lives, can ask questions about how we have created the persons that we are, and can consider the meaning of the stories we are enacting in our own daily lives. As we learn how we have been shaped and directed not only by the narratives we have inherited—cultural, gendered, familial, linguistic—we also learn that we can choose those narratives by which we wish to be influenced and conditioned, and can create the conditions for our own future learning and becoming.

The development of my understandings of teaching and learning over the years, owes much to the ongoing inspiration provided by literature and the arts, and to my efforts to make more significant connections between the arts and education in my life. “Only connect…” says E. M. Forster in the often quoted words which appear underneath the title of his novel, *Howard’s End*, where he writes about the complexity of human affairs, and the values and impulses that animate peoples’
lives. In the middle of the novel, the character Margaret Wilcox speaks these words and those that follow to her husband Henry. Refusing to acknowledge the disconnections between his espoused moral values and his actions, Henry is unconcerned with his double standards and hypocrisy. Margaret hopes that eventually he will recognize the consequences of living a fragmented life and will connect his thoughts and actions, and his mind, heart and soul. She says:

It did not seem so difficult. She need trouble him with no gift of her own. She would only point out the salvation that was latent in his own soul, and in the soul of every man. “Only connect”! That was the whole of her sermon. Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die. Nor was the message difficult to give. It need not take the form of a good “talking”. By quiet indications the bridge would be built and span their lives with beauty. (Forester, 1910, pp. 174–175)

For Forester, it is only when we make connections between the various dimensions of ourselves, that we can become more human. The characters in the novel who can make connections, provide the support for redemption for those characters who fail to develop their humanity because they lead fragmented lives, and lack guiding principles by which to live. Forester makes it clear that if only we could make the necessary connections in our lives, and between ideas, people, cultural groups, different value systems, different ways of knowing and being...the world would be a very different and better place in which to live for us all.

The process of becoming more human is a process of making new connections, and of creating and re-creating a more connected and integrated narrative for our future lives. These cyclical processes involve us in exploring what lies beneath the surface of the stories we enact in our lives, examining the disconnections as well as the connections, and in searching for ways in which to make better connections between the guiding principles which we espouse, and the personal actions and professional practices which we observe in our daily lives. However, it is only when we engage in the creative act of giving form to the disparate threads of our lives, and weave them into temporal, coherent and integrated wholes, that we transform what we know, and can use it to transform ourselves.

I draw here from writing first published in 2001 (Beattie, 2008/2001), to show how my efforts to draw the seeming disconnected threads of my life together helped me to make new connections between the arts and education in my life, and also helped me to use what I knew then to develop my understandings of a narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy.

Narrative ways of thinking, knowing and representing have been with us for a long time, and narrative as a form of communication has been with us since the beginning of language. Reaching back to a preliterate oral culture, our ancestors told stories to make sense of the mysteries of their worlds, to pass cultural knowledge on from one generation to another, and to communicate societal norms, values and shared understanding. Narrative is more than a
communication system; it is a mode of thought. It is only in this century that narrative has been recognized and acknowledged as a way of thinking and as a fundamental way that individuals structure their experience and make sense of their worlds. As Bruner (1986) explains, we construct ourselves through narrative and make sense of our lives by telling stories of those lives. Bruner makes the distinction between paradigmatic modes of knowing and narrative modes of knowing. The former seeks truth; the latter seeks verisimilitude, or observations with the ring of truth. These modes of thinking are used for different purposes. They provide us with different ways of making sense of the world and of responding to the different phenomena in the world—animate and inanimate. Our stories provide us with the conceptual structures that enable us to store and retrieve knowledge we have created; they are the structures within which we understand our lives and plan our future lives.

Hardy (1968) describes narrative as a fundamental aspect of our lives and as a "primary act of mind." Rosen (1986) explains that the narrative forms we master provide us with genres for thinking with and ways to engage in the "eternal rummaging in the past" (p. 226), and in the "daring, scandalous rehearsal of scripts for the future" (p. 237) (Beattie, 1995a, p. 41).

Making Connections Between the Personal, the Professional and the Scholarly

In the context of my efforts to develop new practices which would support a narrative, arts-based pedagogy, I explored ways of creating an experiential activity at the beginning of each class which would make connections between the arts and education, between individuals’ inner and external lives, and between all the members of the learning community. This led to the development of a practice I called a “centering activity”, in which we engage in short, aesthetic, experiential activities at the beginning of each class in order to strengthen the mind, body, spirit connection, to connect us to the sources of our energy and creativity, and to the interconnected life of our senses, imaginations, intuitions, and intellects. The purpose of these activities is also to connect us to each other, to emphasize the connections to the larger cycles and patterns of our own and others’ lives, and to those of the natural world and the universe. These shared experiences can help us to slow down, to temporarily separate ourselves from the busy, bustling worlds from which we come, and to prepare us for the work we will do together in the class.

When I meet each new group of students, I present the first of these activities and invite them to present the centering activities in the remaining classes. I explain to students that their choices can draw on their own backgrounds and expertise and on the richness and diverse ways of knowing of the arts and humanities. Their choices can serve to remind us that art is an experience, and that down through the ages, poets, philosophers and artists of all kinds have given us the kinds of aesthetic experiences that help us to deal with the great questions of existence, of what it means to learn, to explore, to fail, to succeed, and to develop as whole human beings. Their choices can range from the reading of a few lines of a poem like the one at the beginning of this chapter, listening to an excerpt from a short story or to
a piece of music, contemplating a painting, artefact, or web-site, engaging in guided imagery, drawing, or in a yoga, dance or movement exercise. These activities should help us to become fully present and attentive to ourselves and to each other, and also help us to co-create a learning environment that is collegial and collaborative rather than competitive, and that is creative and supportive rather than critical and judgmental. They should also provide us with opportunities to breathe, to feel, and to make ourselves available for the various kinds of dialogue we will have during the class; the solitary and collaborative explorations of the patterns that connect in our lives, and the interactions that can lead us to new levels of connectedness, coherence and integration.

Some students are initially surprised at the nature of this invitation in an academic environment. However, they soon learn to value the opportunity to participate in these activities which allow us to establish relationships of trust, respect and shared expertise so that we can share ideas, perspectives, and understandings. They quickly come to recognize the benefits of a participatory environment that will provide them with support as they negotiate the uneven, circuitous and uncharted territory of exploring the inherited stories, myths and legends of their lives. Students also learn to appreciate the private spaces created by some of these activities, and to connect them to the solitary dialogues they have in the context of the reflective writing. Some of these students’ voices can be heard later in this chapter, and throughout the following chapters as they tell from their own perspectives how the various solitary and collaborative activities and dialogues of the course have helped them to explore the ways in which they have learned, unlearned and re-learned throughout their lives.

As the course progresses, many students develop an appreciation for the extent to which the centering activities help to build the kinds of relationships and community that provide a context for dealing with the challenges of graduate studies, the complexities of real learning, and working at the edges of their understanding and meaning-making. They assist in the process of helping individuals to position their studies in graduate education within the larger context of their lives, and in using their inquiries to address questions such as, Who am I, Why am I here, What is it that defines my humanity, What is the purpose of my life, and What does it serve? These experiential, arts-based activities also help students to more fully understand the ways in which to establish deeper kinds of relationships with themselves and their colleagues, to explore the issues of identity, and the concept of a relational self where the self is given shape and meaning in the context of relations with others. They promote the creation of the close, supportive relationships between and among students and the teacher, which are critically important to enabling them to redefine their understandings of identity, and to create new understandings of identity as that which is formed not only in isolation, but also in relation with others and in social contexts through interacting narratives.

The centering activities and the relationships they foster provide students with a variety of opportunities for making new connections, and they provide practical ways of answering Dewey’s (1938) call to recover the continuity of aesthetic experience with the normal processes of living, and of doing so in the context of
BEATTIE

graduate studies. In the words of the poet Goethe, “A person can find no better retreat from the world than art, and a person can find no stronger link with the world than art.”

Learning About Relationships: Wide Awake in the Kindergarten

Throughout my teaching career, I have learned that good teachers are centrally concerned with students’ learning because they have the learner’s interests at heart. I have also observed the extent to which good teacher-student relationships promote students’ ability to learn and grow. In my view, good teachers work to create the kinds of relationships and learning communities where students can make connections between their inner lives and their external actions, can establish relationships with their colleagues, significant texts and the teacher, and can learn to make meaningful connections between the personal, professional and scholarly aspects of their lives. Good teachers develop their pedagogical practices out of the desire to help students to identify their own purposes and passions, to help them to fall in love with their own questions, and to continually re-create what they know as they create and re-create new narratives for their future lives. Good teachers work to develop their abilities to stimulate students’ curiosity and creativity, their imaginations, intuitions, and intellects, and to awaken each individual to the possibilities of his or her own life.

This kind of teaching requires not only a deep understanding and passion for the subject matter, for developing a wide array of pedagogical strategies that will stimulate and inspire students’ learning, but also a deep understanding of students themselves, and of the ways they learn. It can never be understood as a set of skills, strategies or gimmicks, and it cannot be prescribed, translated into formulae or generalized. For teachers, it is crucially important to know who we are and why we are here, for as Parker Palmer (1998) explains: “We teach who we are” (p. 2). In this view, our professional development is connected to our commitment to the ongoing development of ourselves as whole human beings, to keeping our desires and purposes alive, and to the connections between this and our work with students. Here, professional learning is a life-long journey of self development, of developing the ability to be present in relationships with students, of creating contexts for authentic dialogue and interaction, and of developing the abilities to create learning communities where individuals re-form and transform their understandings and themselves.

Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness. They are able to weave a web of connections among themselves, their subjects and their students, so that students can learn to weave a world for themselves......the connections made by teachers are not held in their methods but in their hearts—meaning “heart” in its true sense as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self. (Palmer, 1988, p. 11)
As I have continued to dig under the surface of the pedagogical story that I tell and enact in my current life, I have searched for those significant experiences which have shaped my understandings of the meaning of good teaching, and which I use to interpret and judge my own teaching and that of others. One of my earliest memories of school provides me with an image of learning and teaching that tells me of important lessons that have stayed with me throughout my career as a teacher. The image is of a kindergarten class in a small rural school, which was home to four classes of children, and which I experienced as a joyful, friendly and stimulating place to be. The Junior Room as it was called, felt like a place where things that mattered took place among people who mattered. My favourite time of the school day was reading class. Here, my kindergarten group would move to the desks at the front of the room. Each of us would take a turn to sit by the open turf fire beside our teacher, Mrs. Loftus, and to read to her, while the rest of the group listened. In my memory, the classroom was filled with the warmth of her presence, with stories and songs, and with the rich smokey smell of the turf fire. I have a vivid memory of what it felt like to sit beside her, almost drowning in her soft brown eyes when I looked into them, as they were like deep and limitless pools of love and caring for children. I remember feeling the warmth of her presence beside me, the warmth of the fire on my back, and the way she gently helped me to say any new words that I hadn’t seen before. I loved the stories, and I loved that I was able to say them out loud.

It was only after I had been teaching adolescents for a number of years that I came to realize the extent to which these early experiences influenced my understanding of learning and of good teaching. It was then that I began to recognize the origins of my desire to create a classroom like this, and to re-create the environment of connectedness, curiosity, trust, caring, and joy that I had felt in this place. I wanted my classroom to be filled with stories, music, literature, and the arts too, so that my students could benefit from them as I did. I wanted my students to have the stories that would help them to explore the questions that intrigued them and which would also help them to deal with the challenges, inconsistencies and mysteries of their adolescent lives.

As a teacher of English to secondary school students, I had all the students in my classes write their autobiographies at the end of a unit called, Who Am I? Students collected the data for this assignment by exploring the significant experiences in their lives, and by engaging their parents in conversations about their early childhood experiences that were beyond the reach of their memories. They shared all these stories, read the literature, poetry and stories of the unit that would help them to imagine lives other than their own, role-played these lives, and expanded their understandings of themselves through the writing of their autobiographies. Working to recreate the kind of learning community I had experienced myself, I also saw the value of students’ participation in the content of the curriculum, and I encouraged them to bring their own songs, stories and poetry into the classroom. These students who came from such a rich array of cultures and societies, provided a wealth of opportunities for us all to access ideas from different worlds, and to imagine the new and varied possibilities available to us.
My later work was as a curriculum and staff development consultant with teachers in the same multicultural school board in the east side of Toronto, which is ascribed to be one the most multicultural cities in the world. In this work with teachers, we encouraged students to bring in to the classrooms, the stories from their diverse backgrounds, their unique cultures and histories. Hearing these stories had the effect of greatly expanding all our horizons; they helped us to understand each other, and to develop not only our self-knowledge, but our intercultural knowledge and understandings. In my collaborative research with one of these teachers, Anne, we created a unit on mythology that began with the myths and legends from the vast array of students’ own countries and cultures. Many of these stories had been handed down orally, and students documented them through taped conversations with their grandparents, relatives and parents. In sharing these stories in the classroom setting, these students came to new understandings of each others’ lives, heard the sounds and rhythms of the many languages they spoke other than English, and had their eyes opened to the rich cultural knowledge and heritages to which they had access. This work with Anne developed into the site of my doctoral research.

In this research, (Beattie, 1995a) and in the representation of its insights and understandings, I used a narrative and arts-based orientation to the collection of data, to the representation of the qualities and complexities of professional development, and of our co-created understandings and knowledge-making. I used story, poetry, dialogue and accounts of practice to evoke Anne’s lived experience of change, the reconstruction of her professional knowledge, and her identity, and in the description of the details of classroom life. In this research, I also drew extensively on the work of another exemplary teacher, a teacher and researcher I encountered in the context of my graduate studies, (Hunt, 1987) and from whose writings and professional practice I learned so much about the “reflexivity, responsiveness, and reciprocality of a mutually adaptive interpersonal relationship” (Beattie, 1995a, p.121).

I had completed this doctoral research and thesis writing, and had been teaching for many years when I went to visit Mrs. Loftus, my kindergarten teacher, during one of my trips to Ireland to see family and friends. I told her about the influence of her teaching on my work as a teacher and researcher, and of my fond memories of life in the Junior Room. I also told her how we all knew how much she cared about us, as she had treated each one of us as if we were very special persons in her life, even when she met us in the village outside of school time. She talked about her love of teaching, and the happy memories she had of her long teaching career. I could see that she was visibly moved to hear me talk about her influences on my work, and to hear that her former pupils remembered her in this way. As I left she gave me a gift of a white Irish linen tablecloth that she said would remind me of her. Inside the package was a small card that I still keep beside me on my writing desk. On it she had written:
Good luck, Good health
God bless you, and guide
you on your way.
May all your hopes come true.

With love and best wishes
from your former teacher in the Junior Room, Kilfenora.

Creating Relationships: The Teacher as Soul Friend

My understanding of the nature of a good teacher-student relationship developed through my ongoing reflections on my practice, interactions with colleagues and with texts, and in conversations with a wide range of colleagues and friends. It was also expanded and inspired by the work of John O’Donohue (1997), whose book, *Anam Cara*, brought the Gaelic term for friendship into our everyday language and thought. In Gaelic, *anam* means soul, and *cara* means friend. O’Donohue explains that the Celtic understanding of this kind of anam cara friendship was where you felt a sense of affection, of intimacy and of recognition. In the presence of your soul friend, you could be your real self without fear or artifice. Your soul friend would accept you as you are, and would always have your best interests at heart. With your soul friend you would feel a sense of belonging, a level of trust that would allow you to reveal the intimacies of your life, and feel the support you needed to be present to your own life, and to inhabit and enact it with clarity, honesty, and authenticity.

Reflecting on this in an educational context, I came to new understandings of how within these Celtic soul friend relationships, teachers and students could be present in each other’s lives in ways that recognize the uniqueness of each individual’s journey through life. As soul friends to each other, we can, through our presence and ways of being as well as in our actions and words, support and enrich each other’s attempts to inquire into the meaning of things, to recognize and develop our unique attributes and capacities, and to find expression for them in the external world. I became increasingly aware of the extent to which these kinds of student-teacher relationships could affect students’ abilities to learn, and I worked to enact this kind of relationship with my students in the graduate and teacher education settings, in spite of the difficulties of doing so.

In my doctoral research with Anne (Beattie, 1995a), I had explored the kinds of learning that can take place within close relationships of trust, respect and intimacy, where individuals collaborate to transform each other’s understandings, and the stories they tell and enact. This understanding of relationships was expanded in the context of my current (Beattie, 2001–2007), and still ongoing research, when I came to new levels of recognition of the importance of the internal relationships that individuals have with themselves, as well as the relationships they have with external others. I came to a fuller appreciation of the significance of the solitary
dialogues that individuals have with their inner selves, as well as the significance of the dialogues they have in relationships with others. These new insights gave me a strong desire to develop practices which would encourage students and research participants to explore the stories they tell and enact in their lives, and to recognize that they have choices in how they tell, retell, enact and re-enact those stories in their lives. This research explores the ways in which individuals with longstanding practices in the arts and in secular-spiritual practices, do this in their lives. These research participants use their chosen narratives (music, literature, visual art, mindfulness-meditation, nature...) to provide them with contemplative contexts in which to explore the landscapes of their inner lives, and to create the new narratives which enable them to achieve their inner purposes in the external world by working with and for others. Through the interaction of their chosen narratives and their life narratives, these educators create new connections between what they create internally, and what they enact in the external world. In the telling, retelling, enacting and re-enacting of their stories, they transform what they know and can do, and continually transform themselves. (Beattie, 2001-2007)

Developing a Narrative, Arts-Based Pedagogy: Inquiry, Interaction and Integration

In the next chapter, I drawing on the specifics of one of the graduate courses I teach, Research and Inquiry in the Arts, to outline the ways in which I work to enact a narrative, arts-based approach to pedagogy. I explain how this approach enables students to explore the stories they are enacting in their lives, and to study the ways in which their consciousness and thought processes have been shaped by the stories they have inherited and by those other stories they have picked up along the way. In this class, students also focus on the significance of the arts in shaping their ways of knowing and being, in influencing their work in professional settings, and in directing their future scholarship as qualitative researchers. In the design of the course, I have found it useful to work with the juxtaposition of the image of myself as “maker” which I had in my early childhood—a music maker, a storyteller, a maker of my own meanings—and the image of the learner as consumer of knowledge, which I also encountered during my journey through other educational settings which emphasized a hierarchical and disembodied view of learning. Working with the tension between these oppositional views, I have explored ways to encourage students to think of themselves as embodied makers, to use their studies to create professional and scholarly lives that are intellectually stimulating and personally meaningful, and to create work that makes a contribution to knowledge, to society, and to their own development as human beings. My efforts are not always successful, and all students do not engage in the work of the course to the same extent. Over the years, I have learned to deal with the inevitable disappointments and frustrations which arise as opportunities for reflection and learning, and as a reminder to accept these unwelcome failures as a necessary part of my own quest for meaning.
This course is open to Masters and Doctoral level students, some of whom take it as the first of the eight or ten courses required for a Master of Arts or Master of Education degree. Others take it as the final course of an eight course requirement towards a Doctorate [PH.D or ED.D.] Most students taking the course choose it because they are intending to use some form of qualitative research methods for their graduate research, and others choose it because they intend to base their future research very solidly in narrative and arts-based philosophical perspectives and methodologies. All these students have unique dispositions, gifts and expertise, and it is understood that they interpret their learning experiences in graduate education in the context of their past lives and their hopes for their future destinies. Many have strong personal and/or professional backgrounds in the arts and have taught in one or more of the arts. Some of these students are practicing artists and some are teachers of the arts.

The course has a traditional structure of twelve meetings of three hours each, a package of required readings, two formal written assignments, and required class attendance and participation. Assessment is based on the two formal written assignments, an educational narrative and a qualitative research proposal, three oral presentations, and class participation. All the activities of the course are designed to provide students with opportunities to engage in the three kinds of interdependent dialogues that will aid them in the processes of inquiry, incubation, interaction and integration. The documentation of the details of these dialogues will help them to generate the materials for the two formal written assignments of the course in ways that are both scholarly and personally meaningful. The course passes through the following phases:

- Introduction to the course and to the principles of a narrative, arts-based, and holistic orientation to research and pedagogy.
- Introduction to the selected readings, overview of qualitative educational research, and of narrative, arts-based, and holistic approaches to teaching, learning and educational research.
- Explanation of the two formal written assignments of the course—an educational narrative, a research proposal for a qualitative study, and three oral presentations.
- Initiation of partnerships, small groups, and explanation of the importance of attentive listening, respectful constructive feedback, and each individual’s role in the co-creation of collaborative relationships and a collaborative learning community.
- Introduction to examples of qualitative, narrative, arts-based, holistic, Masters and Doctoral theses, and explanation of the requirements of presenting one chosen example to the class, and of leading the follow-up discussion.
- Explanation of the processes of learning to do hands-on narrative research with colleagues: writing field notes, narrative interviewing, providing constructive feedback to oral presentations, providing oral and written feedback to the close-to-final drafts of the written assignments for the course.
- Ongoing discussion of qualitative, narrative, arts-based, holistic approaches to educational research through the readings, theses presentations, discussion of research proposals.
Ongoing discussion of the kinds of knowledge created through the arts, and the connections between this and the personal, professional and scholarly in students’ lives.

Ongoing exploration of the links between the students’ existing knowledge, skills and sensibilities, and the design of a qualitative, narrative, arts-based research proposal.

Ongoing discussion of making increasingly significant connections between the personal, professional and scholarly in students’ lives.
2. A NARRATIVE, ARTS-BASED PEDAGOGY: CONNECTING THE PERSONAL, PROFESSIONAL AND SCHOLARLY

COMING HOME

One time, I knew for sure
That I could find my way.
I saw six dolphins surfing through a wave
Heading towards me
Wetsuits glistening in the sun.

‘Just cruising through’, they said
To tell you that we have your number, and your name
Your state of longing and belonging
And the crazy dream of home.

(M.B. 2009)

This chapter is about a pedagogy that is centrally concerned with helping students to engage in their personal quests for meaning through the exploration of the stories in their lives, and on helping them to create new stories for their current and future lives. It is also focussed on providing them with hands-on experience in doing qualitative, narrative, arts-based research, and on preparing them for doing this kind of research with others. Based solidly in the principles of a narrative, arts-based orientation to research, this pedagogy draws on Dewey’s (1938) conception of education as “the reconstruction of experience”, and Bruner’s (1986) explanation of narrative as a mode of thought. It is inspired by the work of Elliot Eisner (2002, 1991) who, in his groundbreaking book, *Arts and the Creation of Mind*, (2002), describes how various forms of thinking are evoked, developed and refined through the arts, and in which he makes persuasive arguments about the transformative power of art to change not only minds but also to change lives.

In this approach to pedagogy, collaborative relationships and a supportive learning community are vitally important aspects of a context where students recreate what they know, and recreate themselves through the processes of self-directed inquiry, dialogue, self-study research, and the writing of a narrative. This approach to teaching and learning is responsive to the uniqueness of individuals’ lives, to difference and diversity, and to different ways of knowing. It is also grounded in the understanding that the ways in which learners perceive the realities

M. Beattie (Author/Ed.), *The Quest for Meaning: Narratives of Teaching, Learning and the Arts*, 29–71. © 2009 Sense Publishers. All rights reserved.
of their learning situations are grounded in the stories that have formed them, and
that resonate in their beings. It is understood that it is these stories that they use to
interpret their experiences, to create new meanings and understandings, and to
create the stories for their current and future lives.

In this approach to teaching and learning, students learn to think narratively, and
to use their inquiries, the dialogues, the oral presentations, and the writing of the
narrative, to learn narrative ways of thinking, of interacting with others, and of
meaning-making. The concepts of “interacting narratives” (Beattie, 1995a, 2001-
going), provide them with useful frameworks in which to explore the ways in
which their lives have been created in the past, to choose how they will be influ-
enced and conditioned in the present, and to create more connected, integrated, and
meaningful stories for their future lives. As they learn to conduct narrative self-
study research and to do narrative, arts-based research with others, they engage in:

– the search for patterns beneath the surface of events and actions,
– the search for the meanings that individuals ascribe to their experiences, from
  their own perspectives
– the attitude that acknowledges that events and people all have a history—a past,
  present and future
– the habits of mind which consider multiple possible interpretations of an event
  or experience from many different perspectives

The writing of the narrative is an important and integral part of students’
inquiries and meaning-making. Through the processes of writing, receiving feed-
back, and rewriting, students identify the significant themes in their lives; work to
reconcile opposites or discordant qualities, integrate the disparate aspects of them-
selves, and use what they know to create a narrative for their future lives. These
processes allow them to identify their images and metaphors, to use them to access
the language of their inner lives and to create meaning-making accounts of their life
histories. By connecting to the past through their memories and feelings, and to the
future through their imaginations, the cyclical processes of the writing provide
them with opportunities to make significant new connections between them, and to
be guided into new levels of consciousness. To create is to transform, and these
processes of creating and re-creating their meanings can be transformative for the
writer. The narratives, when they are well written and have aesthetic qualities, can
allow others to imagine new possibilities and alternative ways of being and living,
and they can also be transformative for the reader. When these narratives allow
readers to enter the worlds they describe, to see what they see, understand as they
do, and to expand their own knowledge and understandings, they provide oppor-
tunities for their authors to, (in Seamus Heaney’s words) be here for good in both
senses of the word.

In the development of this pedagogical approach, I have drawn support from
Gadamer’s (1975) expansion of the concept of interpretation beyond the meaning
of the text to the meaning of the individual’s life, of the world and one’s place in it,
and to the meaning of understanding itself. This work has also been valuable in
helping students to understand the meaning of narrative ways of knowing and
being, and of learning to enact them in their personal, professional and scholarly
lives. It has helped me to model the kinds of responses and feedback to their work which will encourage them to explore the ways in which they have interpreted their experiences, to see that they have come to each interpretive event from somewhere, and to understand that we are all conditioned by the narratives we have encountered in our societies, cultures, and personal experiences. This work has also been valuable in helping me to explain that through their ongoing quests for meaning, and the process of creating a narrative for their lives, students can gain increased understandings and mastery over the composition of their lives, and can develop the adaptive, creative and improvisational abilities to continually create and re-create new narratives for their lives.

Falling in Love with the Quest: Engaging the Heart, the Spirit and the Mind

As each individual’s learning journey is a unique, lifelong quest for meaning, the development of a love for the quest, for the questions themselves, and for making connections between the parts and the whole, is a major aspect of this approach to pedagogy. Students learn that it is only when they engage fully in their inquiries—with their hearts and spirits as well as their intellects—that what they learn will really matter to them in the context of their whole lives. They learn that this process will engage their imaginations, intuitions, emotions, and creativity, as well as their intellects. When they have feelings of exhaustion at the end of a class, it is because they have used all aspects of themselves in the processes of their learning—(the intellectual, social, moral, physical, spiritual, and aesthetic). As this orientation to learning is both participatory and interactive, all students are expected to focus not only on their own learning, but also to collaborate in the co-creation of the environment where they can learn from and with each other, and in which each individual can draw on the rich body of existing knowledge that their colleagues bring to the setting.

The pedagogical practices of the course are designed to encourage students to draw on their experienced knowledge, and to use story, poetry, music, movement, metaphor, imagery and symbols to explore the stories by which they live, to capture the meanings of their experiences, and to create new stories for their future lives. They are also designed to teach them how to come to their inquiries narratively, to learn to present the results of their self-study research narratively, and to learn how to conduct narrative, arts-based, holistic research with their future research participants. The assignments are interconnected and designed to foster and support students’ self-directed inquiries, the making of connections, and the integration of understandings.

In the first of these written assignments, students write narratives which provide an account of their self-study research. In the final assignment, they write a research proposal that outlines the components of a qualitative, narrative, arts-based inquiry with future research participants of their choosing. Within the research and writing partnerships they create with colleagues, students learn how to do this self-study research, and to conduct narrative, arts-based research with others which focus on
the meanings which these individuals ascribe to the stories which they are living out in their lives, from their own unique perspectives.

Narrative Inquiry: The Study of Experience

We live storied lives. We make sense of our experiences by telling stories about our lives which serve to help us understand ourselves, and to communicate these understandings to others. In one way or another, we all try to make sense of our lived experiences by telling stories of them, and as we live our lives, we make our decisions and choices by interpreting them in the context of the past we have experienced and the future that we imagine. Therefore, as the philosopher MacIntyre (1984) explains:

What is better or worse for X depends upon the character of that intelligible narrative which provides X’s life with its unity. (p. 225)

Reminding us that we all use narrative in our daily lives, Barbara Hardy (1975) says that “in order to really live, we make up stories about ourselves and others, about the personal as well as the social past and future.”

We not only think in narrative, we also dream in narrative, daydream in narrative, remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticize, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love by narrative. (p. 5)

The philosophical concern with life as narrative involves the ongoing reflection on lived experience that allows individuals to identify what has significance and meaning to them personally, and of weaving those threads into the new and evolving story of their own becoming. Narrative inquiry provides us with a way to study experience, our own and that of others in systematic ways, to interpret and integrate our understandings, and to represent our meanings by writing narratives. In narrative self-study research, we study the meaning of our own experience, collect the data through the processes of inquiry, reflection, dialogue, story, and conversation, and engage in the systematic interpretation, integration and representation of the meanings through the writing and rewriting of our narratives. Through these processes, we identify those themes, experiential threads, patterns and narrative unities which run through our lived experiences, create new understandings of how they relate to our present and future directions, and weave them into new temporal wholes.

In a narrative approach to teaching, learning and research, it is understood that an individual’s knowledge is embodied, and that it can be observed as is enacted in practical everyday situations. The process of creating and recreating knowledge is a process where something new is made, and this process of making changes not only what is known but also changes the knower. This view of knowledge is grounded in Polanyi’s (1958) conception of knowledge as a personal knowledge in which the knower is inseparable from what is known, and it is always the achievement of persons. Here, individuals’ actions and practices are understood as knowledge in action. This knowledge is held in personal and practical modes
rather than in theoretical modes, it is subject to change, to reconstruction, and to progression; it is not fixed, immutable, objective and unchanging. Through reflection and inquiry, the knowledge held, and the meanings which individuals ascribe to their experiences and actions, can be explored and reconstructed. As they become increasingly aware of the nature and qualities of what they know, individuals can learn to use what they know to learn what they need to know, and can consciously plan the development of their personal, practical knowledge. As Polanyi explained:

In the act of reflection we cause our personal wisdom and experience to interact with the objective realm of knowledge to produce personal knowledge which transcends the disjunctive between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’. (Polanyi, 1958, p. 300)

Drawing on Polanyi’s work, and on the work of Johnson (1987) the concept of practical knowledge was developed in the work of Elbaz’ (1983) where she described the content, orientation and structure of a teacher’s practical knowledge defined in its own terms rather than in terms derived from theory. Elbaz developed the notion that practical knowledge is not just cognitive knowledge, content knowledge or structure knowledge, but that it arises, in Johnson’s (1987) terms:

out of our bodily experiences and provide[s] patterns that are meaningful to us and that influence our reasoning (p. 1)

In the context of their work in narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) expanded on Elbaz’ work and developed the concept of personal practical knowledge which they defined as an individual’s:

..particular way of reconstructing the past and intentions for the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation. (Connelly and Clandinin,1988, p. 25)

Thus, the process of doing narrative self-study research is a process of exploring our uniquely personalized ways of knowing as they are enacted in our actions, our practices, and in the stories we are living out in our daily lives. In doing this kind of research with others, collaborative relationships and shared interpretations and meaning-making are central aspects of the ways in which narrative researchers work with participants to study the meaning of these individuals’ uniquely personalized concrete ways of knowing and being, from the individuals’ own perspectives. These processes involve shared explorations, interpretations, and ongoing meaning-making prior to the documentation of the shared inquiry by the researcher. Research participants receive copies of transcribed interviews and are invited to discuss, clarify, and expand the interim meanings expressed there. They are also invited to comment on the interim narratives that researchers write, to collaborate in clarifying and furthering the interpretations and meaning-making, and in the co-creation of knowledge.

In narrative self-study research, we identify our own themes and look for the supporting evidence in the data we have collected, also noting the ways in which the themes overlap and intersect with each other, making connections between them and continually relating the parts to the whole. In doing this kind of qualitative
research with others, this process of identifying the themes is a shared process which allows us to collaborate in structuring the analysis of the data, in the interpretation, and in the representation of its meanings. The process of identifying the significant themes in the data is outlined by Connelly and Clandinin (2000), and also by Eisner (1991) who explains:

Themes are the dominant features of the situation or identity. In a sense, a theme is like a pervasive quality. Pervasive qualities tend to permeate and unify situations and objects...A qualitative study of a classroom, teacher or school can yield multiple themes. These themes are distillations of what has been encountered. In a sense they provide a summary of the essential features. They also provide clues or cues to the perceptions of other situations like the situation from which the themes were extracted. (Eisner, 1991, p. 104)

This process of identifying the major themes and the central concerns which give individuals’ lives their unity and purpose, is supported by the concept of narrative unity which is defined by MacIntyre (1984) as:

a concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as narrative [links]beginning to middle to end. (p. 205)

Building on MacIntyre’s work, Connelly and Clandinin (1988) explain that in narrative inquiry research, narrative unity describes that:

... continuum within a person’s experience [that] renders life experiences meaningful through the unity they achieve for the person...It is a meaning-giving account, an interpretation, of our history and, as such, provides us with a way of understanding our experiential knowledge. Within each of us there are a number of narrative unities, [they] emerge from our past, bring about certain practices in the present, and guide us towards certain practices in the future. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988, p. 75)

The narratives we create for our lives are always temporal, and in narrative thinking, temporality is a central feature. All events are understood as having a past, a present (that we are experiencing), and an implied future. As our lives unfold, and circumstances change, the temporal meanings we have made must also change. The significance of an event or experience must change when it belongs to a different whole. Thus, when events in our lives take surprising turns, we must learn to see and understand the past in a different light, and to re-imagine the future that we have foreseen. In other words, when the future we imagined cannot be enacted as we had planned, we are also required to change the past from which it has come, and to weave these different parts into a new and always temporal whole. In this way, our identities are always under construction, and as human beings we are always works-in-progress and always in the process of becoming. Through the ongoing creation and recreation of our narratives we continually engage in this creative act of imagining who we can become, and of enacting this in the ways in which we live out our lives. When we do this, we keep coming home to ourselves.
A NARRATIVE, ARTS-BASED, PEDAGOGY

One of the central aspects of an education is in enabling learners to develop the abilities to adapt, improvise, modify, create and re-create what they know and to create and re-create themselves on an ongoing basis. In this way, individuals enrich their abilities to assimilate new experience, to expand their ways of knowing and being, and to adapt to their ever-changing life situations. Polkinghorne (1988), in his influential book, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, explained it in this way:

We achieve our present identities and self concept through the use of narrative configurations, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we constantly have to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is neither a static thing nor a substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what has been but also anticipation of what will be. (p. 150)

*Making Connections Between the Personal, the Professional and the Scholarly*

Approaches to graduate education, and to the education of future academics do not often include a focus on the personal, aesthetic, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of students’ lives, or the exploration of the connections between their inner purposes, professional practices and future research. Graduate programmes do not acknowledge the centrality of stories in students’ lives, and they can often be centered on the behaviourist identification of knowledge and skills which separate the knower from the known. In all graduate programmes, students undertake a range of learning experiences designed to help them to learn what they need to know in order to conduct a piece of original research. This includes:

– acquiring a good working knowledge of the existing literature in the field, and in related fields,
– determining what is already known about a subject and what needs to be known
– the identification and articulation of a research topic and research questions
– acquiring knowledge of the different research methodologies, and choosing a method that is appropriate to the research questions
– understanding the criteria for work that is high quality in the chosen field.
– developing a strong conceptual framework for the research
– making strong connections between the research questions, the theoretical framework, the chosen method, and other existing research studies

Students are required to create an interconnected research proposal for their future research where they chart a personal course through the existing literature, identify a significant research question to explore, create an appropriate conceptual framework, and determine a suitable methodology for the study they propose to undertake. In a narrative, arts-based pedagogy, students do all this in a context where it is acknowledged that the learning they do is not accomplished by disembodied intellects, but by people whose minds are connected to their bodies, their feelings, their hearts and their spirits. Here, students are encouraged to bring their personal
purposes and passions to the research endeavour, and to create course assignments and research proposals that are scholarly, rigorous, and challenging, and also personally and socially meaningful. They are encouraged to use the activities and assignments of the course to make connections to the source of their creativity and inspiration, and between their work in learning about research, and the larger purposes and goals which animate their lives and which provide it with personal meaning.

In this approach, it is recognized that although students, like their teachers, live in a world where things are logical, rational, and technological, as human beings we also live in a world of the imagination. We need poetry, myth, metaphor, story, music, art and nature to nurture all aspects of ourselves. We knew this as children, and as adults, at certain levels of our consciousness, we all know that we need a balance between the rational and the intuitive, the intellectual and imaginative, the linear and strategic, and the literal and the metaphorical in our lives. Students are encouraged to acknowledge this and to use their educational experiences to nurture all aspects of their humanity, to reconnect to the wellsprings of their beings and to the life force that animates them. They are also encouraged to collaborate in the co-creation of pedagogical practices which will stimulate their own and others’ curiosity, creativity, and imagination, and will draw on the rich body of personal and professional knowledge which they and their colleagues bring to the academic context. It is expected that as the course progresses, students will become increasingly more willing to share what they know with each other, to collaborate in the shared meaning-making which will allow them to do together what any one individual could not do alone, and to help each other to make connections between their personal purposes and their future research.

The principles of a narrative, arts-based approach to research provide the conceptual framework for this orientation to teaching and learning. Many students are appreciative of a pedagogical approach that takes them seriously enough to expect that they will want to understand the epistemological principles on which their educational experiences are based, and which help them to understand how the experiences and assignments of the course are grounded in a solid and well-established body of knowledge, to which they can contribute when they conduct their own research. Students learn that:

The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. Thus the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories: teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and others’ stories. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990, p. 2)

They also learn that narrative inquiry, arts-based research, and self-study research are now well established in the mainstream of educational research, and as the course progresses many students value the opportunities to conduct hands-on research, and to practice the processes of collecting, analysing, interpreting and
representing data before they have to do this in the context of their thesis research with participants. The collaborative relationships and the supportive learning community of the course provide them with frameworks in which they receive constructive responses and feedback to their ideas, perspectives, and evolving understandings from a variety of others. This ongoing feedback can help them to adapt and modify their understandings and to expand their knowledge, ways of knowing and being.

Students learn to differentiate between paradigmatic and narrative ways of knowing, to understand that they are used for different purposes, provide us with different ways of making sense in the world, and of responding to the different phenomena in the world—animate and inanimate (Bruner 1986). They also learn to distinguish between different kinds of research, and to consider the range of possibilities available to them in their future research. As they come to new understandings of the ways in which they have learned what they know, they also begin to consider the ways in which knowledge has been defined, to explore the relationship between the knower and the known, and to redefine what counts as knowledge, and as research. As they do so, they come to more fully understand the processes involved in doing narrative, arts-based research, and to understand what it means to do this kind of collaborative research with others. As Polanyi explains:

> into every act of knowing, there enters a tacit and passionate contribution of the person knowing what is being known, and this coefficient is no mere imperfection, but a necessary component of all knowledge (p. 312). [and]. In the act of reflection we cause our personal wisdom and experience to interact with the objective realm of knowledge to produce personal knowledge which transcends the disjunctive between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’. (Polanyi, 1958, p. 300)

As the course progresses, students learn to be present in their interactions with their colleagues and in the activities of the course, not only as graduate students but also as beginning narrative, arts-based researchers. They learn to practice narrative ways of knowing, to develop their listening skills, and to expand their existing understandings by listening to others who have different societal, gendered, cultural, and disciplinary ways of knowing from their own. As they develop their abilities to hear what is being expressed from the perspective of the speaker rather than from their own perspective, these students are preparing themselves for the work they will do when they interview each other for the course assignments and provide responses to each others’ oral presentations. They are also developing their abilities to do narrative, arts-based research with their future research participants.

**Narrative Inquiry, Arts-Based Research, and Holistic Education**

The conceptual framework for this approach to pedagogy is solidly grounded in Dewey’s (1934, 1938), philosophy of experience and of art as experience, of Bruner’s (1986) conception of narrative as a mode of thought, and in the work of
contemporary researchers such as Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 2000), Barone (1993, 2001), Bruner, (1986), Buber, (1965), Greene (1995), Gilligan, (1982) MacMurray, (1961), Miller, J. (2000, 2007), Miller, R. (1990/1997), McEwan and Egan, (1995), Noddings (2003), O’Donohue, (1997), Palmer, (1988), Polkinghorne (1988) Schon, (1987), Taylor, (1989), Van Maanen, (1997), Witherall & Noddings, (1991), and others. A pedagogy whose features are more artistic than scientific also draws on Elliot Eisner’s (1976, 1991a, 1991b, 2002,) pioneering work in qualitative research, which presents the view that scientific inquiry is one kind of research, that research is not a kind of science, and that research [and teaching] can be arts-based as well as science based. It also draws on Eisner’s work in educational criticism, which was a forerunner of arts-based inquiry, and in which the educational critic perceives and appreciates the significant qualities of educational settings, events and materials and presents them through the expressive and evocative language of the art critic. This approach to pedagogy is also supported by the research of growing numbers of educational researchers, who within the past two decades, have taken up Eisner’s call to explore approaches to research whose features are more artistic than scientific. It owes much to the narrative and arts-based movement in research that has taken place over the past three decades, for as Eisner (2000) explains:

Perhaps the most significant development that has taken place in the American educational research community is the exploration of alternative assumptions about the nature of knowledge, the forms of legitimate inquiry, and the modes of representation that can be employed to display what has been learned. These developments are consistent with growth in pluralism of many kinds; cultural, gender, racial, epistemological and procedural. (Eisner, 2000, p. 252)

It was in the context of my graduate studies in English literature that I first encountered a theoretical approach to narrative. Later on in graduate studies in education, I discovered narrative inquiry research in the work of Michael Connelly and Jean Clandinin (1990, 2000) who were pioneers in this line of research in education. The rise of narrative inquiry in the field of educational research began with the work of the reconceptualist movement inspired by William Pinar, (1980, 1975), and Madeline Grumet (1987), which was preceded by the prominence of literary theory in the intellectual world, Hardy, (1968), Kermode, (1967), Ricoeur, (1984, 1985, 1988), Rosen, (1986), Scholes and Kellog, (1966). Narrative has long been regarded as an intellectual resource in the arts, and the origins and history of narrative inquiry can be traced back to Aristotle’s Poetics and Augustine’s Confessions. The use of narrative in fields other than literary theory and education is on the rise, and narrative and story are now well-established in a number of fields such as history, sociology, the philosophy of history, therapy, psychology, medicine and theology, as a way in which we make sense of our lives, and construct our meanings by telling and retelling, enacting and re-enacting the stories of those lives.
In the line of narrative research in education pioneered by Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 2000), I encountered a distinctive form of narrative inquiry where narrative is understood as both phenomenon and method. Here, I found a strong philosophical framework and research methodology for my own research over the past two decades, where I have also drawn extensively on Dewey’s (1938) conception of experiential learning, Eisner’s (1991a), and Barone and Eisner’s (1988) principles of doing qualitative, aesthetic, arts-based research, Connelly and Clandinin’s (1988) concept of personal practical knowledge, MacIntyre’s (1981) concept of narrative unities, Gadamer’s (1975) hermeneutic cycle, Polkinghorne’s (1988) work on narrative ways of knowing and Carr’s (1986) work on time, history and narrative.

The literature on holistic education, also contributes to the conceptual framework for this approach to pedagogy as it focuses on the importance of relationships, on the making of connections, and on the education of the whole person. (Miller, J. 2000, 2007; Miller, R. 1997/1990). The basic principles of holistic education are balance, inclusion and connection, which require a movement away from a fragmented approach to curriculum towards an approach that seeks to make connections at every level of learning by integrating the intellectual, intuitive, and imaginative, and by creating relationships among existing entities. As Miller, J. (2000) says:

The focus of holistic education is on relationships: the relationship between linear thinking and intuition, the relationship between mind and body, the relationship among various domains of knowledge, the relationship between the individual and community, the relationship to the earth, and our relationship to our souls. (Miller, J. 2000, p. 13)

Miller (2000) also explains that the concept of inclusiveness in holistic education is concerned with enacting a transformational approach to teaching. This approach views the learner as a whole human being, and the person and the curriculum as connected. The concept of balance is based on the concepts of the Tao, of the yin/yang, and on the suggestion that at all levels of the universe there are complementary forces and energies which need to be recognized and nurtured in the classroom. Miller (2000) explains that traditional education has focused primarily on the yang energies such as rationality and individual competition, and has often neglected the intuitive, imaginative, interpersonal, relational and cooperative approaches to teaching and learning. In his inspiring book, Educating for Wisdom and Compassion, Miller, J. (2006) provides an overview of holistic education, and a valuable resource which provides practices by which we can break down the boundaries between ourselves and what we are contemplating, and can understand ourselves as whole human beings for whom the development of wisdom, compassion, care and love enables us to become more increasingly more human. In, The Contemplative Practitioner, Miller, J. (1994) explains how through contemplation, which is ‘based on the notion of a deeply interconnected reality as described in subatomic physics and ecology [there is] an is an opportunity to restore a balance between the part and the whole’. (p. vii) He says:
Simply put, reflection is still rooted in a dualistic view of reality in that there is a subject that reflects an object. If we stay with a dualistic view of reality, we ultimately end up with a fragmented and compartmentalized approach to life. Yes, there is a need for analysis and reflection, but there is also a need for synthesis and contemplation. Contemplation is characterized by a merging of the subject and object. As I contemplate a sunset or a flower, separateness disappears and for a moment I can become the object I contemplate. Duality disappears... It is through contemplation that we can see, or envision, the whole. (Miller, J, 1994, p. vii)

A narrative, arts-based approach to graduate and undergraduate pedagogy draws on the long-established humanistic traditions, where the quest for wholeness and meaning in individuals’ lives has been documented in the work of poets, philosophers and artists, and in the interconnected ways of knowing and being that I encountered there, before I came in contact with them in the work of educational research. The need to educate the imagination and the feelings as well as the intellect at all levels of education, is not well understood, yet it is literature and the arts that enable us to imagine and picture situations other than our own, to learn to be empathetic, compassionate, and respectful towards others, and to adapt, improvise, and create our own lives, our societies and our global world. An education that neglects literature and the arts, neglects the richness and diversity of the ways that we have been shown the various dimensions of human existence and human awareness, the ways in which the myths and legends of the past influence our present actions, the interconnectedness of all aspects of ourselves as human beings, and our interconnectedness to all things in the universe. Dewey (1934) understood the profound importance of art and of aesthetic experiences in education, and in individuals’ efforts to create lives which are authentic, which have integrity and are connected to that which is larger than ourselves.

A work of art elicits and accentuates this quality of being a whole, and of belonging to the larger, all-inclusive whole which is the universe in which we all live. This fact, I think is the explanation of that feeling of exquisite intelligibility and clarity we have in the presence of an object that is experienced with aesthetic intensity. It explains also the religious feeling that accompanies intense aesthetic perception. We are, as it were, introduced into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the deeper reality of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences. We are carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves. I can see no psychological ground for such properties of an experience save that, somehow, the work of art operates to deepen and raise to great clarity that sense of an enveloping undefined whole that accompanies every normal experience. This whole is then felt as an expansion of ourselves...Where egotism is not made the measure of reality and value, we are citizens of this vast world beyond ourselves, and any intense realization of its presence with and in us brings a peculiarly satisfying sense of unity in itself and of ourselves. (p. 195)
Writing in 1805, William Wordsworth explained it in the First Book of *The Prelude* when he says:

Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music, there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, makes them cling together  
In one society. (Wordsworth, 1979, p. 47)

**Doing Narrative, Arts-Based Research in Graduate and Undergraduate Classrooms.**

Graduate and undergraduate faculty have a wealth of support for enacting a narrative, arts-based pedagogy in their classrooms, for engaging students in self-study, in helping them to write their educational narratives, and teaching them how to do this kind of research with others. Many contemporary researchers in the fields of narrative and arts-based research have written about the processes, criteria and qualitative features of these approaches to research. For example, in their book *Narrative Inquiry*, (2000), Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly trace the origins of narrative inquiry in the social sciences, provide a wealth of examples, and a wide range of narrative methods. They outline the processes of doing narrative inquiry and the criteria for good narrative research and say:

We wrote about good narrative as having an *explanatory, invitational quality*, as having *authenticity*, as having *adequacy and plausibility*. (p. 185)

In the field of self-study research, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) provide a framework and a set of guidelines for those engaged in self-study research, and for determining the qualities of good research-based, autobiographical writing. These researchers draw their insights from literary conventions, and they present them in the article entitled, *Guidelines for Quality in Autobiographical forms of Self-Study Research*. The recent text, *Self-Study Research Methodologies for Teacher Education*, by Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik (2009) provides a range of research methodologies for doing self-study research, and further resources are provided by the chapters in *The International handbook of self-study of teaching and teacher education practices*, especially the chapter by La Bosky, (2004), *The methodology of self-study and its theoretical underpinnings.*

The major features of qualitative research that may be characterized as arts-based, are outlined in Barone and Eisner’s (1988) article, *Arts-Based Educational Research*. Here, these authors explain that although aesthetic elements and design features can be present in all research, the more pronounced they are, the more the research is characterized as arts-based. They explain that the most significant of these features are identified as:

– the creation of a virtual reality  
– the presence of ambiguity  
– the use of expressive language
the use of contextualized and vernacular language
the promotion of empathy
the personal signature of the researcher/writer
the presence of aesthetic form.

........................................................... (Barone and Eisner, 1988, p. 75–78).

In my own work I have mapped out the processes of exploring experience as
lived and told stories, and of writing educational narratives in the book, The Art of
Learning to Teach; Creating Professional Narratives, (Beattie, 2007/2001). Here, I
guide the writer through the processes of reflecting on his or her own stories, the
stories of others, and of reflecting, responding, and doing the work of self-study
research, and of writing an educational narrative. Throughout the chapters, writers
are provided with narratives written from students’ perspectives, and guided through
the cycles of reflecting on these and on their own past and current experiences,
writing about them, responding to feedback from others, and of doing the neces-
sary writing and rewriting to engage in the cyclical processes of their own narrative
inquiries. I have also used narrative and arts-based inquiry in a number of other
research situations to explore teacher development and educational change (Beattie,
1995a), learning to teach and becoming a teacher (Beattie, 2007/2001), exemplary
secondary schooling (Beattie, 2004) and the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of
educators’ knowledge (Beattie, 2001/2007).

In a journal article entitled, New Prospects for teacher education: narrative
ways of knowing teaching and learning, (Beattie, 1995c), I described the ways in
which new knowledge about teaching and teacher education has been created in the
field of narrative studies, outlined the parameters of the field itself, its connections to
other related studies in education, and the possibilities it provides for programmes
in teacher education. I also provided the historical context of narrative studies in
the field of teacher development by outlining the research on teacher cognition
which preceded it, and showed the connections between narrative inquiry and
narratology, literature, and the many other disciplines where narrative studies have a
long and well-established history.

In narrative, self-study research and in narrative inquiry with others, the writing
of a narrative in which the interpretations and meanings are woven into a coherent
and integrated whole, is an important and integral part of the inquiry process, for as
Maxine Greene (1995) says:

Learning to write is a matter of learning to shatter the silences, of making
meaning, of learning to learn. (p. 108)

The process of writing and rewriting the narrative involves the writer in the
uncharted, cyclical and continually shifting processes of the quest for meaning,
as each new meaning made changes the past from which it has come and the
imagined future to which it is moving. Tom Barone (1993) explains it eloquently
when he says:

...each student, like the rest of us, is a person in the midst of writing and
rewriting her own life story. Each is comparable to an artist in the middle of a
creative process that moves through a resolution that is not pre-formulated,
but gradually emergent. The end of the story of each living human being is yet to be encountered. The uncertainty that accompanies this process of self-creation is, therefore, as the literary critic, Frank Kermode (1967) noted, the source of much human anxiety. This is the anxiety of the artist, the poet, the storyteller and the schoolchild, who has dared to begin a work of art (here her life) without a clear sense of how to bring it to a meaningful closure.

(Barone, 1993, p. 240)

*Developing Students’ Voices through Dialogue and Interaction.*

This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.  
Farewell, my blessing season this in thee!  

(Shakespeare, 1978, Hamlet, p. 205)

Students are encouraged to take advantage of the activities and interactions of this pedagogy which acknowledges the importance of the development of their authentic voices and self-awareness, of making their tacit knowledge explicit, and of developing their abilities to become increasingly more aware of others’ perspectives and ways of knowing. These are all necessary to their growth and development as future narrative researchers, and this is reflected in the activities, assignments and three kinds of dialogues of the course, which are designed to help them to engage in the interaction of narratives, and in the exploration of the central concerns that give their lives unity and purpose. The reflective writing requirement of the course provides them with a framework for the establishment of a dialogue with themselves in which to explore the stories by which they live, and the influences, attractions, patterns and resistances they feel as they chart the landscape of their inner lives. It provides them with a context in which to be attentive to their emotions and feelings, and to develop the abilities to nurture and strengthen the qualities of self-awareness which are essential to the work of self-study research and of doing collaborative narrative inquiry with research participants. Daniel Goleman (1995) explains the importance of emotional awareness to all learners, and his words have special significance to those who engage in narrative, arts-based, research with others.

Emotions that simmer beneath the threshold of awareness can have a powerful impact on how we perceive and react, even though we have no idea they are at work. (p. 55)

Through the solitary processes of their reflective writing, students can explore the details of their emotional lives by bringing their feelings and emotions to the surface, examining them, and developing the abilities to understand and manage them in the context of their whole lives. This private dialogue combined with the collaborative dialogues of the course, can also help students to be more attentive to the emotional lives of others, and to become more attentive to what is taking place.
in their interactions with others. The dialogues that students have with themselves in the reflective writing enable them to create a knowledge that is uniquely theirs by integrating their subjective knowledge with objective knowledge, and creating a personal practical knowledge that is embodied, embedded in a culture, and based in the narrative unities of their lives (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). This intersubjective knowledge is both theoretical and practical, and it is expressed by an individual in his or her particular situation and in the individual’s personalized ways of knowing. It is a personal practical knowledge which Clandinin (1985) defines as:

A special knowledge [that] is composed of both kinds of knowledge, [theoretical and practical] blended by the personal background and characteristics of the [individual] and expressed by her in particular situations. (p. 361)

The development of students’ personal practical knowledge and of their authentic voices is also supported by the readings for the course which present the voices of others which will support these objectives, and which will inform, inspire challenge and stimulate their own ongoing inquiries. The readings are chosen to provide them with the concepts and ideas which will assist them with their ongoing inquiry and with their future research. They are also chosen to provide an overview of qualitative research methods, and specific examples of such methods as narrative inquiry, arts-based educational research, portraiture, self-study research, and various other qualitative research methods. Students are encouraged to enter into an active dialogue with all these texts, and to document the discussions, responses and arguments they have with the texts in their reflective writing journals. As they engage more deeply in these dialogues, many learn that this approach can be liberating and empowering, and can see how it helps them to develop their own unique voices. By responding to the readings of the course as they would to the voices of other more experienced researchers and writers and by entering into a dialogue with these authors as they read, students become less intimidated by them and more open to hearing what they say. Approached in this way, the voices of these experienced researchers and writers are less likely to overwhelm students’ own developing and less experienced voices: they can be a source of inspiration and support for the ongoing quest for meaning and for imagining and designing their future research.

Having their authentic voices acknowledged in an academic setting can often be surprising for students. When the learning environment is openly accepting and welcoming of their voices, their diverse ways of knowing and their differences, students can learn to develop their abilities to communicate in a variety of ways, and to challenge existing hierarchies, theories and what is taken for granted in increasingly sophisticated ways. They also learn to value language and expression that is honest and authentic and to seek out new and unacknowledged ways of thinking, writing and speaking. Through the various processes of the three kinds of dialogue in the course, students practice the ways of developing their voices, learn to build bridges between their understandings and those of others, and learn to imagine
ways in which to create future research that will enable them to make meaningful connections between their personal, professional and scholarly lives.

In the course readings, I draw on two published book chapters to provide students with examples of narratives where the authors acknowledge the connections between education and the arts, voice and identity, and between creative and scholarly activity in research and in professional practice. One of these chapters is Elliot Eisner’s (1991b) *What the Arts Taught Me about Education*, and the other is my own chapter, *Beginning with Myself: My Own Story of Teaching and Learning* (Beattie, 1995a). In these two chapters, we describe the ways in which the arts have shaped and influenced our thinking and decision making, and have directed the course of our lives. They provide students with ways in which to begin to consider how the arts have influenced them, and in which many of their significant learning experiences have taken place in informal settings and in the context of interactions with others in relationships, family, work, culture and community settings. Reflecting on their experiences in the arts, many students are surprised to recognize the extent to which they have been influenced and shaped by these experiences. Similarly, they are surprised to recognize the ways in which their experiences with the arts have enabled them to develop their voices and distinctive ways of knowing. Some students also express their disappointment when they recognize that they have lost their connections with the arts and have lost their voices in the process. As they begin to re-establish these connections, they position themselves differently in relation to their graduate studies, to the processes of creating new knowledge, and to their identities as qualitative researchers. They also learn to relate to their own unique learning processes in new ways, and to consider the characteristics of the conditions and contexts for their future learning. As they make increasingly more significant connections between the development of their voices, the growth of their identities, and the creation of their narratives, their abilities to connect these to their professional practices and to their future research also become more solidly established. As they do so, they also begin to understand that the transformation of knowledge and the creation and re-creation of a self is an ongoing work of improvisation and of creativity.

The following excerpt from Laura Hegge’s reflective writing, shows how her inquiry into the role of the arts in her life helped her to make new connections between her personal understandings and her professional practices. Laura was a high school English teacher who was in the Master’s programme at the time she wrote this. She is now writing her doctoral thesis.

The reflective practices introduced to me in my graduate studies have allowed me to better understand my struggles and successes in teaching by forcing me to make my tacit knowledge explicit. By exploring my personal connections to the arts, I have been able to see what it is I want to bring to my students as a teacher of the arts. By continuing to examine my own stories and meanings, I will be better able to provide the space for students to tell their own stories and to make connections with the stories of others.
By navigating through the questions in the inquiry, I have found links between my own interactions with the arts as a participant and creator, as a teacher and as a human being. The arts are the means through which we express our individual humanity. They also provide meanings which allow us to float beyond our individuality and the cognitive realm of our right and left brains to connect with the deeper mind that runs like a current below the level of language and conscious thought at the very seabed of the universe. The arts cause us to question ourselves and to search deeper beyond the frame of our individual lives past the boundaries of time and culture into the depths of the ocean that is our common consciousness.

A. FOSTERING A DIALOGUE WITH THE SELF: CHARTING THE INNER LANDSCAPE

Go into yourself and see how deep the place is from which your life flows—
Rainer Maria Rilke

The unified framework of the written assignments, oral presentations and reflective writing of the course provides a context for students to engage in cycles of inquiry, to explore the meanings of their experiences, to receive feedback and responses from a variety of others, and to integrate their new understandings through the writing of a narrative. The processes of the three kinds of dialogues in the course—the dialogue with the self, dialogue with others, and dialogue between the dialogues—are designed to help them to do this individually and collaboratively. However, it is only when students create their narratives, by identifying the narrative themes and unities of their lives, and weaving their new understandings into a coherent, integrated, meaningful whole, that they make the connections between the different parts of their lives, transform their understandings, and transform themselves. The writing is an integral aspect of the inquiry process, for as Richardson (2000) says, ‘writing is a method of inquiry in itself, a way of finding out about yourself and your “topic”.’ She says:

Although we usually think about writing as a mode of ‘telling’ about the social world, writing is not just a mopping-up activity at the end of the research project. Writing is also a way of ‘knowing’—a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable. (Richardson, 2000, p. 923)

Each student is required to document the details of the interdependent dialogues in their private reflective journals, to write the stories of the significant events in their lives, and to document their memories, arguments, questions and meaning-making. In doing so, they learn to explore the landscape of their inner lives, to connect to the sources of their creativity, and to learn, unlearn and re-learn. Through the processes of exploring their own lives and in reading about the lives of others, many students begin to acknowledge the complexity of their lives, the tensions and
the competing demands which they seek to reconcile, and the ever-changing landscape in which they are living and learning. Many students also learn to adopt a more forgiving and compassionate attitude towards themselves and their imperfections, and to acknowledge that the quest for new meanings involves making mistakes, and having wrong ideas as a necessary part of their explorations, and of the process of having right ones.

For many graduate students, the expectation that they will write in forms other than standard academic prose can fill them with fear and dread. Many have never written in reflective or creative forms or in the first person, in an academic environment. Also, many are not accustomed to having the personal, emotional, moral, and aesthetic aspects of their lives acknowledged in graduate classrooms. As they become more confident and comfortable about engaging in a dialogue with their inner lives, students often find that this reflective journal writing allows them to hear their previously hidden inner language and music, to access long-forgotten memories and stories, and to come to greater understandings of how the realities of the worlds in which they are living are shaped by the stories they tell themselves about it. This writing allows them to generate the data for their self-study research, their interpretations and meaning-making, and the writing of their narratives.

Students need to know that their vulnerabilities will not be exploited in educational settings if they are to lower their defences and participate in ways where they can show themselves as they really are, with their weaknesses as well as their strengths. It is essential for them to have this fundamental reassurance and to know that their dull and gloomy sides are just as welcome as their bright and shiny sides. When they begin to write for themselves and to accept that the purpose of the written and oral dialogues is to help them to connect with what is important to them in life as a whole, because this also gives meaning to their academic studies, it allows them to participate more willingly and to benefit from the responses, perspectives and insights provided by their colleagues. It allows them to explore more deeply the ways in which their past experiences have shaped and conditioned their knowledge, their ways of interpreting and their ways of being, and to take responsibility for their interpretations, and when necessary, to re-create them in the light of their new insights and understandings.

Although some students are initially wary of the suggestion that they should keep a reflective journal as a requirement of the course, when they are encouraged to consider it as a private, unstructured, imperfect, series of explorations into what is meaningful to them in their lives, they are more willing to try it. Many feel less intimidated when they can learn to use the journal as a place to explore the darkness as well as the light, and to vent their frustrations, anger, and dissatisfactions with the world, as well as to celebrate its joys and successes. The reflective writing requirement also becomes less threatening when students find that they can explore and express their meanings through drawings, sketches, quotations, musical compositions and poems, and can use all these forms of expression to promote questioning and interpretation. Given that there are no rules for this writing other than putting a date on each journal entry, no expectations of perfection, or no involuntary sharing of the writing, many students learn that they have the right to make decisions
regarding how they will document their meanings, and the authority to tell their stories the way they know them.

The distinctions between formal written assignments that are being assessed according to the criteria for quality work in an academic setting, and reflective writing which is done for the student’s own purposes, is an important distinction for students to understand and embrace. In the reflective writing, it is important that they let go of their criteria for good writing, and adopt more playful, curious, and less judgemental attitudes towards their tentative thoughts, ideas, and expressions. When they can do this, it allows them to open up, and to use the writing to explore their meanings, to write about what they don’t know as well as what they do know, to shed the familiar propositions, and to deepen their inquiries. This process of opening up to the dialogue in the writing also allows them to be more open to the dialogues with colleagues in classroom discussions and in the oral presentations. When students are willing to share their ideas and issues with others with honesty, they can receive valuable responses which can enable them to hear themselves in new ways, and to adapt, modify, and expand their understandings.

One of the most important ways I can help students to develop their voices and to overcome their fears of writing [and of making oral presentations], is by doing what I expect them to do, and teaching by example. When I can show some of the benefits of this kind of writing by doing it publicly, I have been able to alleviate some students’ fears and to garner more willing participation for the reflective journal writing requirement of the course. By writing publicly on the blackboard as students write privately in their journals, I can show them how I use the writing to open up a dialogue with the ideas, questions, feelings, concerns and dilemmas I am dealing with in my life, and the ways in which I try to make sense of them through the writing. As I become more confident and comfortable with a group, I can bring some of what is alive and vital inside me out into the external world, and use the writing to access the images of my inner life. I can show students that one of the major benefits of this kind of writing is the circularity of the process, which allows me to revisit my own thinking, to re-think about what I have thought about, and to consider the many possibilities available to me.

This writing in public is not easy for me as any writing that I do spontaneously is always unfit for anyone’s eyes but my own. Further, I explain to students that in my experience, good writing is all about rewriting. When I do it privately, reflective writing allows me to get the images, the metaphors and the language flowing by trying things out, generating lots of material, having lots of tentative ideas that go nowhere, and of searching for the gold among the dross. The process allows me to play with the ideas and the language, to make mistakes and connections between things, to rant, to argue, to remember, and to tell stories to myself. I explain that in my experience a writer can’t sit around hoping to produce pages of insightful ideas the first time he or she sits down to compose, or expect brilliant thoughts to come out fully formed. For me, it is always important that I stay close to my personal purpose for the writing, and to remember that what I have to work hard at and what I am prepared to struggle and make sacrifices for, will often lead me to good writing eventually. The process is always one which
Yeats called ‘a raid on the inarticulate’, and of developing the ways in which to, in Yeats’s phrase, “turn the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast” into “an idea, something intended, complete.” When the raid goes deep into the issues that are at the core of my being and to what is non-negotiable there, the process can lead me to the articulation of new understandings and new intended and complete meanings.

I urge students to think of their reflective writing as a way of opening up the channels to their inner lives, and of working to find the lifeline that connects them to the source of inspiration and creativity in their lives. I explain that I have done this kind of reflective writing in public for my high school students, when I was teaching English, in order to demystify the writing process for them, and to show them that writing is done by human beings just like themselves. This practice held its own challenges at the time, but doing it for a group of graduate students, many of whom are excellent writers, holds even greater challenges. I provide an excerpt from my reflective journal here, where I describe one of those times when I did this public reflective writing for graduate students, and documented my reflections of continuing to do so as the course progressed.

Creating a Dialogue with the Self—in a Public Place

As students wrote in their reflective journals, I wrote on the blackboard, and explored what I was thinking and feeling— in public. As I knew that I was going to do this, I had decided that it might be useful for the students to know how I had prepared for this particular class. I began to write my reflections on my experience of doing this, the choices I had made, and the decision-making processes I had used. I explored the processes of connecting my thoughts to the content of the course, to these individuals in this particular class, and of connecting the universal to the particular and back again as I prepared. As I wrote, I reminded myself that even though this experience was difficult for me, it was even more difficult for some of the students who had never done this kind of writing before. I hoped that by displaying the messy, non-linear, exploratory features of my own writing, seemingly without embarrassment or shame, the students would be encouraged to break free from the constraints imposed by their images of writing in the academic context, and from the necessity to produce perfectly formed thoughts in their reflective journals. As I wrote, I hoped that this spontaneous reflective writing would help them to break through the obstacles which were preventing them from accessing their own voices, knowledge and ways of knowing, and that it would encourage them to jump into the deep end and trust that they would not drown. How could they drown? They have nothing to lose in their private writing havens, I was thinking. I am the only one with something to lose!

Reflecting back, I recall that I had used this blackboard writing technique for ten or fifteen minutes at the beginning of the class, and had tried to model the processes of exploring the inner landscape, as I was also expecting students to do in their journals. As I continued to do this, and listened to the
positive responses from students, I became more relaxed and confident in using the writing to think out loud, to explore my current thinking, to make connections between the theme of the particular class and the goals of the course, to reflect on the readings we had done for the particular class, and on the planning I had done for the class to connect the conceptual and methodological aspects of the research to the pedagogy. I could even write about my hopes that all this would be beneficial to students’ learning. Then, I began to write about my ongoing connections with the arts...the books I was reading, the music I was listening to, the art I was looking at, the various concerts and operas I was going to...and their effects on me. The more I wrote in this way, the more honest and authentic my voice became. I began to hear myself using some good expressions, language that was contextualized and personal, and sometimes even pleasing to my own ear.

As the course progressed, I began to take increasing risks in the writing and to do what I encouraged students to do in their reflective journals, articulating my doubts and uncertainties, trying to clarify my puzzlements, and exploring ways to build bridges between my understandings and the dark places where things were murky. I wrote about the teaching practices that I believed had not worked very well, the gaps between my intentions and the outcomes, and my plans for what I would do next. I also wrote about my struggles to make better connections between the philosophical underpinnings of my espoused philosophy and theoretical framework, and my actual classroom practices: the gaps between the story I was telling myself and the one I was trying to enact.

Students in the class who had spoken of “hating reflective writing”, began to relax and to talk openly about the arts (or lack of the arts) in their lives. I encouraged them to think of the arts with a small ‘a’, to think about play as the child’s first attempt to be creative, and to recall times when they played, lived out lives other than their own, and created worlds in which to enact realities that were different to the ones they inhabited. Students began to tell me that they were writing stories of their childhood play and of creative and imaginative events in their young lives. They also started to wonder and write about why they had lost their connections to the arts because of their busy personal, professional and academic lives. Deeply shocked, and sometimes initially in denial, students talked and wrote about the circumstances under which they had lost their connections to things they had once valued so highly, and began to interpret the meaning of this in their lives. Many students wrote significant stories that acknowledged their deep connections to art-making at an earlier time in their lives, and acknowledged their feelings of loss and betrayal. Many students spoke of coming to recognize how the writing was helping them to reclaim their lost voices, their lost histories and their suppressed ways of knowing and being.

In the classroom dialogues and conversations which followed, students began to share excerpts from their private reflective journals, often telling stories of the ways in which their prior experiences in education had de-emphasized the
expression of personal experience. Now, they learned that they could really acknowledge the significance of their personal experiences and could choose what to make public to their classmates, and what to keep private. This realization allowed them to open up to their inner lives in the writing, to engage in authentic dialogues which could always be private, and to reclaim their histories and stories of experience. They told stories of class, culture, gender, poverty, race, and an education system where they were expected to take in the knowledge of others but discouraged from thinking of themselves as makers of anything. Gradually, students began to understand that the reflective journals were a safe and private place where they could explore the stories they were living, and give voice to their interpretations and understandings. They began to trust their voices, and to develop them by using them to remember a time when they regarded themselves as makers and keepers of knowledge. The reflective writing provided them with a way to enter into the dialogue with their former selves, to be present to their earlier experiences, to probe and explore them, to make new connections, and to consider new ways of interpreting, and understanding them.

As students became more confident in this dialogue with their inner lives, many spoke of how this was helping them to explore the ways that habit and convention had suppressed their voices and ways of knowing, and was helping them to look critically and creatively at their experiences and at the ideas they had accepted as ‘real’. Some spoke of how the writing had helped them to recall other times in their lives when they thought of themselves as creative, as makers of things and ideas, described how it helped them to re-establish their connections to the sources of their inspiration and joy, and to rediscover the voices and the knowledge they thought they had lost. As they gained confidence in the distinctive ways of knowing they had learned through the arts, they also began to consider how they might use these in their professional practices and their future research. Increasingly, students opened up the dialogue between the various parts of themselves that had been socially and academically conditioned, which had presented difficulties for the development of their authentic voices, and had been felt as obstacles for the creation of a coherent, integrated, personal, professional and scholarly self. (M. B. Reflective Journal)

Writing with students in this public way allows me to show them that I am willing to be open and vulnerable before them, as I ask them to be before me. By demonstrating that I trust them enough to show them the rough and uncharted edges of my thinking, and the meandering, imperfect processes of my writing, I am encouraging the same attitude. I work to overcome my hesitation to do it because I want them to see how they can use the reflective writing to tell the stories of their experience as they know them, to have the experience of looking back at what they said, and of re-thinking what they thought. By sharing the tentative, rough and unfinished writing with them, my hope is that students will also become willing to share their unfinished thinking with me and their colleagues. Some students in
these classes are far better writers than I will ever be, and it is often those
students who are the most critical of themselves and who have the hardest time
sharing anything that is not perfect. This sharing of what is imperfect and unfinished
is important because it allows us to collaborate at the edges of each other’s
meaning-making, and in the making of shared meanings and understandings.

When students become less fearful of the writing process and more willing to
use it to deepen their inquiries, they often find that it helps them to negotiate those
places where old understandings meet new ideas, and in which new insights into
stories, memories, and significant events of their lives, interact with older versions.
As they tell more and more stories of their connections to the arts and to art-
making, students become more perceptive about the role that engagement in arts
experiences and art-making has played in linking the personal, private realm of
experience to the public, conceptual realm in their lives. Then as they come to see
that they are connected to many communities—(familial, professional, social,
linguistic, cultural and academic)—many also learn to construct a research agenda
that is grounded in the uniqueness of their personal and professional knowledge,
and that can take advantage of their experiences and expertise in the arts to further
their scholarly interests and future goals. Also, as they begin to respect and value
their own voices, many students find that they are not so intimidated and
overpowered by the stronger and more authoritative voices they encounter in the
readings of the course and in the published texts of the academy: they gain
increasing confidence in their own voices and in the music of their inner lives.

In an excerpt from the reflective writing she did in the context of the course,
Research and Inquiry in the Arts, Nancy Dawe, a doctoral candidate in the Faculty
of Music and an experienced music teacher, explains how the processes of her
inquiry helped her to transform her understandings of her professional practice and
her identity. She says:

Until recently, I was not able to articulate my personal philosophy of music
education. Admittedly, it was not something to which I gave much thought—
neither during my teacher education programme nor during my time as a
practising teacher. However, through my work in graduate studies, I have
come to realize what it is that I value in terms of music education and how
those values came to be. Through a narrative self-study process, I have begun
to uncover the ways in which my life experiences, outside of my formal
teacher education and professional practice, have informed the ways in which
I create curriculum, develop relationships with students, and nurture spaces
for emerging identities in my classroom.

As a result of my inquiry, I feel grounded in the decisions I have made as a
teacher, and I feel more comfortable with my identity as a teacher. I have not
always felt that I have lived up to the expectations that were set before me
during my teacher education. I have struggled to understand my true
motivations as a teacher and to make sense of my approach to music teaching
and learning—an approach that does not seem to be rooted in the knowledge
and experiences I acquired during my formal teacher education. Discovering
A NARRATIVE, ARTS-BASED PEDAGOGY

the concept of ‘personal practical knowledge’ has been one of the most powerful experiences of my graduate studies. It has enabled me to negotiate many of the tension points I had been experiencing surrounding my understanding of myself as a teacher. Further, it has only been through the discovery that knowing myself is critical to being able to know and teach others that I have come to terms with my own teaching practice and my teaching self. Through my narrative self-study, uncovering the life experiences that have informed my practice and that have shaped my identity as a teacher has been extremely liberating. It is my belief that my heightened self-knowledge will further enable me to create viable spaces for identity development in my classroom and to approach music education as transformative education.

Through the process of writing a narrative self-study piece which explored the influences of the arts on my life, I discovered several significant lessons about teaching that I did not develop through my teacher education program—the importance of feeling empathy, of being an interested listener, and of making connections between music and the world. As a music education student, it always seemed to me that the relationships I would have with my students would be musical ones, that the stories I would share with them would be musical ones, and that the connections I would make would be rooted in our shared musical knowledge and experiences. Through my lived experience as a music teacher, I can now assert that there is so much more to being a music teacher than teaching music. I have always known that, but I never had the confidence in asserting that. My narrative self-study enabled me to make sense of who I am and to take ownership of what I value as a teacher.

B. THE DIALOGUE WITH OTHERS: ATTENTIVE LISTENING AND CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSES

Human beings tend to regard the conventions of their own societies as natural, often sacred. One of the great steps forward in history was learning to regard those who spoke odd-sounding languages and had different smells and habits as fully human, as similar to oneself. The next step from this realization, the step which we have still not fully made, is the willingness to question and purposefully alter one’s own conditions and habits, to learn to observe others. (Bateson, 1989, p. 57)

The three oral presentations of the course are designed to help students to develop their voices, and to hear the voices and perspectives of others. They also provide a forum for interactive learning and for the stimulation of individual and collective reflection, interpretation, and meaning-making. They provide opportunities for the fluid interplay and interaction of diverse ways of knowing, and for developing an awareness and understanding of different ways of knowing and being. When students release their privately held ideas and perspectives from the cocoon of clarity of their own minds, they often learn that their ways of knowing and being
are not universally shared. When they can learn to really hear ideas and perspectives that are different to their own, they can expand their understandings, re-cast their perspectives, and learn to tell new stories of themselves and of others that are more appropriate to their current and future realities, and to a world that has changed since they developed their constructs and understandings.

The oral presentations are designed to help students to re-connect to an earlier understanding of themselves as ‘makers’, to develop their abilities to voice their understandings, and to receive responses from multiple others. As they share ideas, theories and resources from their diverse backgrounds in the arts, humanities, sciences, and other academic disciplines, students learn to recognize the value each other’s ways of knowing, and to become more responsive to each other. When students feel that the relationships and the community around them are genuinely respectful and trustworthy, they learn that they can be courageous enough to say what they really think, can open themselves up to expressing different perspectives and ideas, and also to accept that their colleagues can disagree with their ideas and understandings when this is done in respectful ways.

It is often a new experience for students to give and receive a wide range of oral and written responses to their work, to and from multiple others in the context of graduate education. It takes time for them to develop the levels of trust where they will put their prejudices and experiences into play, and feel comfortable enough to articulate unpopular, biased, or ‘politically incorrect’ ideas and perspectives. The oral presentations provide a context for them to receive and provide constructive and respectful responses to each other in the role of a soul friend/anam cara, and this can help them to consider things from a range of perspectives rather than from their own sole perspective. In this way, many students can let go of earlier ways of knowing in the light of their new insights, and can move from their understandings of known universes to the imagining and enactment of new ones. As the course progresses students also become increasingly more adept at providing feedback for each other’s work orally and in writing, and to learn the processes of being collaborative narrative researchers in each others’ inquiries. This culminates in the work they do for each other in the writing/research partnerships where they provide responses to the drafts of each other’s final assignments for the course. This work also allows them to create a rich body of data —individually and collaboratively—, for the two formal assignments of the course: the writing of a narrative and the preparation of a qualitative research proposal.

**Oral Presentation One: Something that Inspires me and Something I have made**

In the first oral presentation *Something that Inspires me; Something I have Made*, students are invited to present an object or item that is a significant form of inspiration for them. This can be it a quotation, an excerpt from a novel, a painting, drawing, or photograph, or other similar motivator. They are asked to explain why it is a source of inspiration, and to explain its significance to them to the best of their ability. After this, students present an object or item that they have made, be it a poem, a painting, a piece of craft/art work, a website or other creation, followed
by a description of what the process of creation meant to them at the time they made it, and what it means now when they think about it in the context of their roles as knowledge-makers and future researchers. Through attentive listening and respectful, constructive feedback in the form of written field notes, students provide support and feedback to each other.

Students are often nervous and fearful of the expectations of these presentations, and of exposing the details of their inner lives to colleagues and a teacher who are unknown entities in their lives. As teachers, we need to respect these feelings, and to model what we expect our students to do even though it requires that we show ourselves as whole human beings who have vulnerabilities and uncertainties as well as our academic status and credentials. In teaching by example, we openly acknowledge the challenges, emotional investment, fears, trepidations, and courage involved in an activity such as this one. By sharing our sources of inspiration, creative efforts and tentative meaning-making with students, we show that the process of making something concrete in the external world requires improvisation, creativity, intuition, and imagination as well as intellect. We also show that we value narrative and metaphoric thinking, expressive language, an authentic voice, and the use of arts-based ways of knowing to represent meaning in the academic context.

I have drawn here from the reflective journal I wrote after I made a presentation of “Something that inspires me and something I have made” to a class. I follow this with the writing I did a week later when I reflected on the presentations that students made.

*Something that Inspires me: Something I have made*

For my inspirational piece, I chose the poem, *The Wishing Tree* by one of my favourite poets, Seamus Heaney. For the thing I had made, I had chosen a rough draft of a poem I had written very recently, entitled, *For Toni Morrison*

At the beginning of my presentation, I handed out copies of the Heaney poem, and I read it aloud, lingering over the words and the rhythms. Then I read it again for the sheer joy of it, explaining how Heaney’s words engage me at every level of my being, provide me with images of transcendence, and help me to imagine a better self. I told of my love for Heaney’s language, ideas, images, and rhythmic patterns, and how they affect me as music does. I also explained that my love of poetry goes back a long way, my love of Heaney’s poetry goes back to the first time I heard it, and this is a time that is long before he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. I told of how I am always astonished at the image of the tree ascending at the end of the poem, as it connects earth and heaven and all those watching, trailing the comet’s tail of wishes granted during its lifetime behind it. This image is one to which I return over and over again. It helps me to know who I am, and why I am here. It connects me to myself, to the earth and the sky, and to all that there is. When I read it or recite it silently to myself, I feel gratitude to the poet for making it present in my world.
In the second part of my presentation, I distributed and read aloud a draft of a poem I had written very recently in response to my intense inner feelings on hearing Toni Morrison speak at a convocation ceremony at the University of Toronto. I had called my poem, *For Toni Morrison* as I had written it to try to capture the meaning of my experience of being in her presence, and the emotions I had felt inside. The poem ended with these lines:

Looking up I saw the Goddess,
Slowly moving overhead.
Smiling, gilded by the sun, she said
The crown is bought and paid for,
All you have to do
Is wear it.

I found it difficult to read my own words and to talk about the frustrations I had felt in trying to find a language to describe the experience which I had felt so strongly, and for which I initially had no words. I spoke of my incoherence and incompetence, my struggle for language and my intense desire for clarity and coherence. I described the difficulties of finding any appropriate external expression for this intense inner feeling and truth. Giving myself time to breathe, I then invited students to bring their chosen items the following week, and told them to do their best to describe the sources of their inspiration and their creative processes as I had tried to do in this class. I reminded them that all their presentations would be listened to as attentively and respectfully as mine had been, thanked them for their attentiveness and interest, and for all the wordless feedback I had already received from them.

The following week, students brought their inspirational pieces and their art-making of many kinds to the class. There were paintings, drawings, handwork, pottery, musical compositions, poetry, a web site, and writings. As they presented and spoke of their sources of inspiration and experiences in making, students showed the intensity of their connections to the objects and artefacts they had chosen. Increasingly, they became more comfortable in speaking about their connections to these, and of their significance in their lives. As the presentations progressed, students began to relax in noticeable ways, and to show both surprise and delight at the warmth and enthusiasm of their colleagues’ responses. As they let go of their anxieties, they began to communicate with greater ease, and even though a few individuals prefaced their presentations with comments about their fear and discomfort, they seemed to lose the tension in their voices and bodies as they began to feel their own emotional connections to the objects and artefacts they were presenting. This increased as they began to pick up the wordless but welcoming responses and messages from their colleagues.

After the class, some students explained that the experience of choosing items for the presentation had caused them to realize the extent to which they were disconnected from the sources of their joy and inspiration, and of being
determined to re-establish a connection. They spoke of my willingness to do the exercise first as a critical aspect of making it possible for them to do it before a group of their peers that they hardly knew, and of finding the courage to do it because I had done it first. Students also spoke of how the presentations which they had initially regarded with fear and intimidation had felt liberating and empowering once they got started, and were especially so when they were over and they had started to think of what the experience had ‘brought out of them’. I encouraged them to document all these thoughts and feelings in writing so that they could be re-visited, and re-interpreted and re-created in the context of new insights and understandings.

Prior to the presentations, I had taught students how to make field-notes as qualitative, narrative researchers, so that they could provide feedback to each other’s presentations. They had chosen partners ahead of time, and had agreed to record the details of each other’s words and actions, paying attention to all that was expressed orally and visually, and also to that which was expressed through the body and the emotions. Students prepared their research notebooks by drawing a line down the page to remind them to differentiate between what they actually heard and saw, and the inevitable urge to interpret, judge, and bring their own meaning-making into the activity. I also wrote field notes for each student who made a presentation, and gave them my hand-written notes at the end of the class. Earlier, I had explained that this activity would provide them with valuable opportunities to develop the abilities to listen attentively and to notice nuances and details in another person’s speech, and of the importance of this in preparing for their work with future research participants.

This process of making field notes provided students with hands-on practice in learning qualitative research skills and also provided each of them with a range of valuable responses and different perspectives on how their words had been heard and their actions perceived. For many students, this stimulated new levels of reflection, exploration, interpretation, and meaning-making. Several students responded to their colleagues with gratitude, and spoke of valuing the hard work, commitment, and generosity of spirit which they felt. The intensity of these processes of presenting, of providing meaningful feedback to each other, and of collaborating in the intimate relations of this activity, had the effect of creating threads of connectedness between us all, and a web of connectedness where we were connected to each other in new ways, and also connected in new ways to ourselves.

As I continue to reflect on this activity and the follow-up discussion with students, I see that it provided a context for students to continue to build trusting and respectful relationships with themselves, with each other and with me. It allowed us to acknowledge and value the emotional, aesthetic, moral and spiritual aspects of each other’s lives as well as the intellectual, and to create a new vision of what relationships could be in an academic environment. The activity had also provided me with a context for modelling
narrative questioning...for asking questions that ask for more of the story, acknowledging that it has past, present and future dimensions, that show genuine interest, respect, desire for the expansion of meaning, and which also acknowledge that each individual knows his/her own experience like no one else does. I also noticed that students were picking up the qualities and tone of my questions and asking their own questions of colleagues that looked for more meaning and a fuller version of the story being told. Increasingly, the questions which had an implied criticism or judgement embedded in them, or were imbued with a kind of interrogation, became more rare.

I am starting to appreciate the ways in which these oral presentations enable us to create the kinds of relationships and learning community where students can learn with all aspects of themselves as human beings. Students learn to articulate their understandings, hear how their voices are being heard by others, and are encouraged to deepen their inquiries into their relationships with their creativity, connectedness to the arts, and understandings of themselves as makers. By doing my presentation first, I am required to ‘take a leap into the dark’, and to try to look fearless as I share my sources of inspiration and my creative products, in all their imperfection. In preparation, I have to continually remind myself that I am only doing what I expect my students to do, and that I should trust the process and take the risks because it is what I tell students to do, and expect that they will do.

Each time we do this oral presentation in the class, I am reminded of how powerful the experience can be for each individual in the room, and this includes me. I am also reminded of how valuable it is when I show (rather than tell) students how much I treasure my connection to the arts, my lifeline to the sources of my creativity, and my experience of the quality of a life that accompanies the process of creating something. I am also aware that these presentations allow me to show the importance of a life where the personal, professional and scholarly are intertwined, where a strong connection to creativity and making is fully present, and enjoyed as an ongoing source of inspiration, and a process of making and re-making new knowledge and understandings, and of remaking the self. (M. B. Reflective Journal)

Oral Presentation Two: Creating a Museum Exhibit of My Life

In the second oral presentation, *Creating a Museum Exhibit of My Life*, students are invited to present a collection of objects that will serve to illustrate their connection to the arts, their learning through the arts, and the role of the arts in their lives as persons, professionals and new educational researchers. Each student sets up the exhibit in the classroom ahead of time, and in turn narrates the journey through the small exhibit, holding each piece and explaining its significance to the group. Students make tape-recordings of their presentations, and research/writing partners provide written feedback to the presentations in the form of field notes. In the context of the whole course, the timing of this presentation is critical as it requires
well-established collaborative relationships among students, and a well developed community where collaboration and shared meaning-making, [without aggressive questions or selfish behaviour] can almost be taken for granted.

As students learn to articulate their knowledge in authentic, personal ways, and to hear responses from others, they learn how to learn from and with each other. They also learn that through this collaborative interpretation and shared meaning-making, they can do together what no one individual could do alone. Students begin to see that through the telling of their stories, listening to the stories of others, and receiving feedback, they are engaging in the processes of self-narration and of uncovering their self-knowledge; in the circular process which Gadamer (1975) refers to as a ‘fusion’ of old understandings with new ideas (p. 30). They gain increasing understandings of how this process involves the continuous reconstruction and transformation of experience and the construction of new levels of understanding. As they allow themselves to delve deeper into their inquiries they come to recognize that they are involved in the continuous construction and reconstruction of their identities and of a narrative that requires the re-ordering of the past, present and future.

I provide an excerpt from my reflective journal here to provide a description of the oral presentation entitled, Creating a Museum Exhibit of My Life, and my reflections on this.

Creating a Museum Exhibit of my Life

In the presentation, Creating a Museum Exhibit of my Life, students presented collections of artefacts which are significant to them in the context of their developing inquiries and which show the relationships between the personal, professional and scholarly aspects of their lives. The activity allowed them to access their ways of knowing through the aesthetic, emotional, social, moral and spiritual dimensions as well as through the intellectual. This is in contrast to the ways we usually work in graduate studies where we generally begin with the intellect and often stay with the intellect.

Students have several weeks to create this collection which often includes visual materials, music, personal and professional mementos, books, toys, documents, crafts, art-work, writings, and other items. They display their artefacts as if they were a museum exhibit of their lives, and as individuals present each artefact, they explain its meaning and significance from their personal perspective and reflect on its meaning in the context of the ongoing inquiry. Because they are more accustomed to beginning in the world of the intellect in graduate education and of disregarding the world of feelings and the aesthetic, some students begin with academic theory and language, and by connecting their explanations to the cognitive objectives of the course. When they accept the invitation to go beyond this, to begin with the personal, they begin to tell the stories around the object, to make increasingly significant links between the object, the people in their lives, and various aspects of their lives. They are often very surprised at the depth of their own thinking, their emotional responses, and the interpretations they do in front of a room full of
people who are only a few steps removed from being strangers in their lives, but with whom they have been developing increasingly more trusting and collegial relationships.

Students audio tape their presentations, their research/writing partners take field-notes, and they write their own reflections on the experience immediately after the exercise. In their reflections, I encourage them to focus on their immediate reactions to the experience itself, to consider the effect of the reactions of their colleagues, and to write about how they heard their own voices in this arena. When I ask them about the experience, students invariably tell me that the first thing they write about are the fears they had prior to the presentation. Then they tell of the surprising features of the experience itself and of being amazed at what the immediacy of what the experience ‘brought out of them’. They tell of situations where they could hardly believe the things that they heard themselves talking about in public and in an academic environment. Many also tell of being very surprised at the ways in which they had responded so viscerally and emotionally to their chosen artefacts, and were left considering the power of these objects to evoke memories, and to activate their imaginations as well as their intellects. Students also speak of the value of hearing the presentations made by their colleagues, and of the opportunity to provide responses to others where they felt that they contributed to their colleagues meaning-making. They also talk about all the new questions that opened up, and of the frustrations as well as the joys of an inquiry that gets deeper and which seems to be never ending.

I am aware that this activity is highly dependent upon the quality of the relationships and sense of community in the classroom. Each time we do it, I remind myself that the scheduling of this activity has to be absolutely right, and with each group I teach, this ‘right time’ is a different time in the course schedule. Everything depends on the quality of the relationships that have been created, the conditions of collaboration and of community which have been built, and the levels of trust, respect and safety that students feel. This affects the levels of exploration, interpretation and meaning-making to which students are prepared to go in public. It is important that they have already experienced a range of classroom activities where they have voiced their ideas and meanings, taken risks, and received constructive and insightful feedback from others.

I observe the extent to which students’ learning is enhanced by the quality of the responses—spoken and unspoken—that they receive from their colleagues and from me. Using a narrative approach to questioning and responding, I have tried to teach by example, and to encourage students to ask the kinds of questions that will encourage their colleagues to tell more of the story, to go deeper into the meaning of the experience as they know it, and to explore the many possible interpretations available to them. Increasingly, students learn that in the role of co-researcher and soul friend to each other, they are of value to their partners when they can show that they are attentive to the details and nuances of what is said and not said, to what is written on the lines and between the lines, and responsive to the patterns and themes, and to the silences and the spaces. Students learn the difference between the kinds of questions and feedback which invite the telling of fuller
A NARRATIVE, ARTS-BASED, PEDAGOGY

versions of the story and those which have the effect of shutting things down, and
learn to develop the abilities to engage in the former, and to disengage from the
latter. (M.B. Reflective Journal)

Oral Presentation Three: What is a Thesis?

In the third oral presentation, *What is a Thesis*, which is scheduled to run throughout
the course, each student presents an example of a high quality, narrative, arts-
based, holistic thesis. This course requirement is designed so that students will read
and examine a recently completed thesis that is of high quality, is meaningful to
them, relevant to their own research interests, and which will also be useful and
valuable to their colleagues. This calls for a close reading of the thesis, and for
outlining the nature of the research, the conceptual framework on which it is based,
the contribution to the literature and to professional practice, and the significance
of this work to the presenter. Students provide oral feedback to each other’s work
at the end of the presentation, as they do to the other presentations, asking
thoughtful questions, and working to promote each others’ understanding. Students
also provide written feedback to each other through the internet between classes.

The discussions following the presentations allow for the kinds of dialogues
where students learn to distinguish between the different kinds of research, and
also develop their understandings of work that is of high quality and that which is
of lesser quality. They also learn of the wealth of existing qualitative research that
is narrative, arts-based and holistic, see how the various parts of a thesis are
connected to each other, and the ways in which they fulfil the criteria for high
quality research. Many students explain that this course requirement has the effect
of de-mystifying the research and thesis writing process, admit that they had never
read a thesis before, and express surprise at finding that reading a thesis can be
pleasurable and highly informative. They explain that the processes of presenting a
thesis to their colleagues in the class and of hearing the details of the wide variety
of qualitative research presented by others, had helped them to make the image of
their own future research and a completed thesis into a real possibility for them.
Many speak of how it had also helped them to plan their future research.

Fostering the Dialogue with Others

By beginning with an inquiry into the ways in which the arts have influenced their
lives, students who have been disconnected from the arts, gain new understandings
of the distinctive ways of knowing they have created through the arts, and
transform their understandings of the ways in which they can bring their distinctive
ways of knowing and being into their work as educational researchers. Collectively,
the three oral presentations provide them with a wide range of opportunities to
engage in the dialogues with others which enable them to deepen their quests for
meaning, and to receive a wide range of responses from multiple others. As they
learn that their creativity, intuition, and imagination are just as welcome as their
intellects, students are more inclined to introduce playfulness, fun, humour, and
laughter into what they do. Increasingly, they accept that they can be spontaneous, can take risks and have things go wrong, and that mistakes, unexpected hitches, and failed efforts can be understood as steps on the road to eventual success. Some students make great strides in what they can accomplish in a short time when they avail of the opportunities to experiment and explore and to respond to the wide range of valuable feedback they get from their colleagues in the class.

Seeing other peoples’ work can be very valuable in helping students to see and understand at a more conscious level what they have done themselves. Also, when they see how their work has the power to affect and inspire their colleagues, and to engage them at all levels of their being, they begin to assess the merits of different kinds of research, and to consider the ways that certain kinds of qualitative research can engage their research participants and future readers with the whole of their humanity. The discussions of the class and the interactions within the dialogues provide valuable contexts in which students learn to distinguish between the kind of research that engages only the intellect, and that which also engages the emotions, the spirit, and the moral, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of the reader. As they become increasingly more knowledgeable about the various kinds of qualitative research, and the variety of forms of representation available to them as qualitative educational researchers, they begin to seek out those ways of doing research which can promote the empathic participation of the reader in the lives of the persons they are writing about, as well as their intellects.

C. CREATING A DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE DIALOGUES: INTERACTION AND INTEGRATION

The vision of human wholeness is an ancient one. It can be found in the worldview of indigenous peoples, in Greek culture, in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Taoism, and in the American transcendentalists. Each element in our body is interconnected and our bodies are connected to all that surrounds us. These interconnections form the whole. Marcus Aurelius (1997) saw this: “This you must always bear in mind, what is the nature of the whole, what is my nature, and how this is to that, and what kind of part is it of what kind of a whole: and that there is no one who hinders you from always doing and saying the things that conform to the nature of which you are a part.” (p. 9)

The writing of the narrative involves the student writer in a new dialogue between those dialogues that took place with the self, and those external dialogues with texts, with colleagues and with others. It is only when they write their narratives that they draw the disparate parts of their lives together, confer order on their experiences and interpretations, come to new understandings of how the parts are related to the whole, and create a new, coherent, integrated whole. As they write and rewrite their narratives, students become increasingly aware of the power of the process to help them to bring form, coherence and harmony to what may seem to be disparate aspects of their lives, to work to reconcile opposites, and to
A NARRATIVE, ARTS-BASED, PEDAGOGY

integrate the knower and the known. As they create these temporal portraits in time, they synthesize the meaning of their experiences, bring a stronger sense of focus, integration, authenticity and wholeness to their lives, and gain an appreciation of how these narratives they are creating will always be works-in-progress, for the end of the story can only ever be imagined. As the horizon towards which it moves continually shifts and changes, the end of the individual’s life has to be re-imagined continually, and the parts have to be reconstructed over and over again into a new whole.

The creation of their narratives involves students in the dynamic interplay of the dialogue between the dialogues, in finding the right voice with which to articulate the forming and reforming of their understandings, and in the making of new connections and new meanings. This process is one where the writer makes connections between ‘their roots and their reading’, their reflections and their writing. As Seamus Heaney (1980) says about his own growth as a poet:

Finding a voice means that you can get your own feeling into your own words and that your words have the feel of you about them; and I believe that it may not even be a metaphor, for a poetic voice is probably very intimately connected with the poet’s natural voice, the voice that he hears as the ideal speaker of the lines he is making up. (p. 43)

Creating a narrative is a process of making sense of a life in the midst of that life and within the wholeness of the life as it is currently understood. It is a process of synthesizing and integrating what is known, of merging the knower and the known, and of making something new. As students construct and re-construct what they know, they also construct and re-construct themselves, as each completed cycle of inquiry leads into the next cycle of imagining, contemplating, interpreting, articulating, and enacting the persons that these individuals now see that they can become. Drawing on all the materials they have created through the dialogues of the course, individuals work to identify the themes and tensions in their lives, seek to reconcile opposites and discordant qualities, to integrate them, and to form them into a coherent, meaningful whole. The process can be filled with the mixed feelings of hope and tension, given the uncertainties of the journey and the undisclosed destination which is always changing. The writer must continually make connections between what has been created and what is imagined, must live in the tension between them, and must struggle to give shape and form to the emergent meanings. When writers stay close to the source of creativity and inspiration and engage wholeheartedly in the work of bringing the emerging insights and interpretations into new forms and understandings, the process of writing and rewriting the narrative can be both engaging and empowering, and can help them to make their way home to themselves.

I have written about the writing of a narrative elsewhere (Beattie, 2007/2001), and have explained how the cycles of writing and rewriting provide a framework for making connections between the themes and threads of individuals’ lives, for recognizing their specialized knowledge, skills, and sensibilities, and for creating meaningful connections between the various aspects of their lives. These cycles of
writing and rewriting can inspire deeper levels of inquiry, and can help students to consider the connections between the purposes of their inner lives and their actions in the external world. When their narratives have aesthetic and artistic qualities, they can help readers to hear their unique perspectives and voices, to vicariously experience their explorations, and to gain insights into their own unique quests for meaning. Like literary works, these narratives can engage readers intellectually, emotionally, morally, aesthetically and spiritually, can show them who they are, help them to imagine who they might become, and suggest how the stories they live out in their lives might be otherwise. They can sometimes help readers to change the stories they are living, and to change their lives.

Through these formal assignments, and the activities and oral presentations of the course, students learn the ways of doing narrative self-study research, and of collaborating with each other to learn how to do narrative, arts-based research with others. Within the research and writing partnerships they create with colleagues, they learn how narrative researchers work to explore stories, and to identify significant patterns and themes, continuities and contradictions in those stories. They learn to use mind-mapping techniques and visual thought-webs: they read and respond to each other’s writing drafts, and collaborate in each other’s meaning-making. Students learn that the processes of doing this kind of narrative, arts-based research and writing, can be creative and artistic processes when the researcher wishes it to be so, and has the abilities to make it so.

D. COLLABORATING IN STUDENTS’ INQUIRIES IN THE ROLE OF CO-RESEARCHER AND SOUL FRIEND

"Hope" is the thing with feathers-
That perches in the soul-
And sings the tune without the words-
And never stops—at all-

Emily Dickinson.

In the role of co-researcher and soul friend, the teacher can enter this dialogue between the dialogues by providing one-on-one written feedback to the penultimate draft of each student’s narrative, prior to assessment. In this role the teacher can provide the kind of responses that will stimulate new thinking and connections and will help students to take their inquiries to deeper and more significant levels of meaning. This involves listening actively and attentively to what is said and not said in the text, honouring the complexity and uniqueness of the life stories, and of continually checking for understanding throughout. In this role, the teacher can help students to identify new connections, provide responses to their pattern-seeking and the exploration of themes, and suggest contacts and new resources. In this collaborative, non-judgemental role, the teacher can also help by highlighting the parts of the writing where the author’s voice is clear and the insights are authentic, and indicate also those parts that have an inauthentic ring, or where the reader feels the presence of untold or silent stories in the text. In this role of
co-researcher and soul friend, the teacher can also provide the encouragement, and inspiration which most writers need in the final stages of their writing, and which can give them the confidence and enthusiasm to look for those deeper levels of integration and meaning-making.

Over the years, I have worked to develop my abilities to provide feedback to students’ oral and written work in this role, and to teach by example the differences between narrative and paradigmatic ways of knowing, and of responding. Supported by Connelly and Clandinin’s (2000) work in narrative inquiry, I have developed ways to do this in the written feedback which I provide to the penultimate drafts of their narratives. I have written elsewhere about ways in which students can provide these kinds of responses to each other’s written work in the context of the writers’ workshops where they can collaborate in each other’s meaning-making (Beattie, 2007/2001).

A narrative way of responding to students’ writing is one which focuses on the meaning that is embedded in the narrative history of stories and events. In responding to their writing in the role of a narrative co-researcher and soul friend, the teacher is present in a way which shows that he/she has the student’s interests at heart, is working on the student’s behalf, and is using a language and a voice that is respectful, supportive and encouraging. This role requires the continual development of presence and attentiveness, of the ability to hear the resonances, resistances and silences between the lines, and to see glimpses of things that hint at how subtle details might be parts of a larger, unexamined whole. In this approach, the questions and responses invite the expansion of meaning and the telling of new (sometimes partly hidden) stories. It also includes paying attention to emotional resonances in the stories told, of hearing the untold or incomplete stories, and of trying to help students to go deeper in their meaning-making, by inviting them to ‘say more’. In these written responses to students’ work, I have worked to develop ways to invite them to acknowledge that narrative ways of knowing always have a sense of tentativeness, and that there are multiple possible interpretations of any event from many different perspectives. I have looked for gentle but probing ways to ask students to consider other possible meanings, to look at issues from a variety of perspectives, and to explore other possible interpretations.

Here, I provide an excerpt from the narrative of a former student to show how the teacher in this role can collaborate in the final stages of the dialogue between the dialogues in a way that encourages new levels of connections and which can deepen the student’s inquiry. The excerpt is from the narrative written by Robert Lompart, a visual artist, secondary school art teacher, and Master of Education student who was enrolled in the Research and Inquiry in the Arts course. Rob was a reluctant writer at the beginning of the course, and he explained that his ways of knowing and understanding were visual. His lifelong enjoyment of visual art and of his own art making had always provided him with a rich quality of life, yet his professional life as an art teacher, his graduate studies, and new role as a father of a baby girl were creating a severe lack of time for these, and this was causing him some frustrations. Additional writing was the last thing he needed.
In the penultimate draft of the narrative to which I responded, Rob had written three sentences about the first time he had seen the painting, *Passenger Pigeon Hunt*, by Antoine Plamondon. He wrote:

An historical painting that I find conceptually interesting is a painting by Antoine Plamondon, *Passenger Pigeon Hunt*, painted in 1853, and now part of the permanent collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario, casually portrays three boys enjoying an afternoon of passenger pigeon hunting along the St. Lawrence River. I assume that the artist intended this to be a relatively pastoral painting, but almost 150 years later the discourse presented by this painting is immense.

As I read Rob’s words, I could hear him explaining how the painting had affected him visually and intellectually. Beneath the lines, I could also hear an emotional resonance, could feel his passionate response to the aesthetic qualities of the painting, and the sense of loss that he was intimating, but not articulating. In my written responses to his writing, I told him of these resonances I was picking up beneath the surface of his words. I asked him to say much more about his actual experience of seeing the painting for the first time, to describe what he saw and felt in greater detail, and to draw on all his senses in doing so. I urged him to probe more deeply into the meaning of the feelings and thoughts that were evoked by the painting at the time he saw it, and again as he was remembering it in this new context of his current inquiry. I also urged him to explore the emotional and other connections he might have felt then and now, as well as his visual and intellectual responses. Then, I asked him to consider why this particular painting held such a significant place in his life, and how it might be connected to some of the central issues and purposes of his life, given that he had seen a lot of significant artworks first hand in Canada and elsewhere.

Rob responded to my suggestions and invitations by writing an expanded version of the piece where he gives a much fuller account of his response to the painting, and his subsequent reflections on its significance to him. This excerpt from his final narrative shows how he responded to my comments, questions and suggestions, and used them to make significant new connections and understandings.

One artwork that is significantly meaningful to me is a painting by Antoine Plamondon, entitled *Passenger Pigeon Hunt*. This painting casually portrays three boys enjoying a day of pigeon hunting along the St. Lawrence River. I remember the first time I saw this painting hiding on display near the back of the historical Canadian collection at the Art Gallery of Ontario. I remember being drawn towards its large size and its smooth and shiny varnished surface—the picture has an immaculate quality—and examining its carefully rendered details: the gentleness of the boys, the fineness of their clothing, the workmanship on their gunstock and powder horn, but most of all the beautiful details and vivid colours of the birds, taken and presented before me.
What continues to resonate most for me, today, is that when this painting was created in 1853, it was likely intended to be a pleasing pastoral account of life in Lower Canada. Today though, I am haunted by the thought that the trophy birds are Passenger Pigeons—now extinct—and by the gesture of the boys towards the valley—the energy of their youthful anticipation penetrating through the stylistic refinement and restraint of the day—towards a flock of living Passenger Pigeons that I have never had the opportunity to see. The painting is more powerful than the presentation of the details it portrays.

Plamondon’s painting catalyzes for me, all the scientific censuses and literary passages of millions of Passenger Pigeons that once darkened the midday sky over Canada and the passing of the last Passenger Pigeon in 1914. Everything that I know and feel about Passenger Pigeons is harnessed and released by this one painting, in an instant.

Almost every artwork that has had an aesthetic impact on me has been as a result of a direct experience with the artwork. Each artwork allows me to make connections about my understandings of the world, and to construct new meanings through my own interpretation and translation. The learning is multifaceted: it creates and recalls facts and details, connects to memories and evokes opinion and emotion.

Experiences with art have provided me with a significant means through which I have constructed rich meaning and understanding about myself and the world...

In my teaching, this understanding enables me to help students to develop awareness of their own aesthetic understanding, and to understand the role of the aesthetics in art. Many students have limited exposure to art and it is important to me to have students experience as much artwork as possible so that they can experience their own connections. Often I will provide opportunities for students that allow them to work with an artwork of their choice, as opposed to touring the whole class through one artwork. This allows students to begin to find understanding that makes sense to them.

What began as a personal inquiry into understanding the significance of my experience with the arts, allowed me to understand what I value from the arts, and to expand my understanding of using the arts. This has expanded to my understanding of using the arts in the process of doing research with others and creating meaningful formats for representing the research. As a result I have a greater appreciation for the role of the arts in my life, and the value the arts bring to educational research.

Rob’s expanded version of the three sentences he initially wrote shows how he used the responses I made to his writing to deepen his inquiry into the role of the arts in his life, and to make deeper connections between his responses to the painting, and to his life as an artistic, morally-based art educator and beginning educational researcher. My responses to his initial three lines had included all the
ways of listening to stories and listening for stories that I have worked to develop over the years; the stories told and untold, and the stories that are partially hidden beneath the surface. In this role of co-researcher and soul friend, my responses were focussed on collaborating in his quest for meaning, and in the creation of a new dialogue where through our interacting narratives:

Lives meet lives.... and interact and inform one another, influencing and changing one another in the process as the energies of each are harnessed in the service of the other, and [in which] new possibilities, relations and forms are created. (Beattie, 1995a, p. 143)

The process of engaging in this interaction enabled Rob to come to new understandings of the importance of the direct experience of the painting to engage him at levels that are beyond the intellectual and visual, and which also include his ecological, moral, and spiritual sensibilities. It helped him to make connections between his new understandings and his professional life as an art teacher, and also to connect this to the recognition of the primacy of direct experience with the aesthetic in students’ lives in order to help them to make their own connections and new meanings. The process also helped him to make valuable new connections to his future research and to the fine Masters’ thesis he subsequently wrote.

In the expanded version of the writing, Rob eloquently describes the power of art to help him understand himself and the world around him, and also to stake out the source of his creativity and uniqueness as a human being. It helped him to recognize that his experience of seeing the visual representation of the now extinct Passenger Pigeons had transcended time and place. The realization that neither he nor his baby daughter would ever see one of those birds, once so numerous, they would darken the sky when passing, has great poignancy and a sadness in the telling. His new writing shows how the responses to his work allowed him to go to deeper places in his inquiry, and to use his own distinctive voice to express the meaning of the transformation of his understandings. It shows how he integrated his new meanings into his existing knowledge and understandings, created ways of knowing, and a new self.

Providing responses to students’ writing in its final stages, in this role of co-researcher and soul friend, allows the teacher to participate in intimate ways in the dialogue between the dialogues at a significant time in the process for student writers. This work can be mutually beneficial as it also provides the teacher with a framework in which to enact a unified philosophy of research and teaching which acknowledges the emotional, aesthetic, moral, personal, and intellectual dimensions of students’ lives. Through interacting narratives, this process can be a context which stimulates curiosity, imagination and the joy of learning for both the teacher and student, and it can be deeply satisfying, inspirational and renewing for a teacher, as it requires the continual adaptation, improvisation and creative processes which result in new learning. As Dewey, (1916) said:

The alternative to furnishing ready-made subject-matter and listening to the accuracy with which it is reproduced is not quiescence, but participation, sharing in an activity. In such shared activity, the teacher is a learner and
the learner is, without knowing, a teacher—and upon the whole the less
consciousness there is, on either side, of either giving or receiving instruction,
the better. (p. 188)

Interacting Narratives: Collaborating to Learn.

The teacher in the role of co-researcher and soul friend can be present in all the
dialogues of the course, and in her own distinctive voice and from her unique
perspective as a learner, Winifred Hunsburger tells of how the various kinds of
dialogue of the course enabled her to make important connections between the
personal, professional and scholarly aspects of her life. In this excerpt from the
narrative she wrote in August, 2004 in the context of the course, Research and
Inquiry in the Arts, she presents insights into the ways in which the writing of the
narrative enabled her to ‘claim herself’, and provided the foundation from which
she wrote a research proposal which was grounded in who she is as a human being,
and where she was at home to herself as a person, professional and scholar. At this
time, Winifred was a doctoral candidate and elementary school teacher. Four years
later, in April, 2008, she completed her doctoral thesis, Inquiry Learning: A narrative
inquiry into the experiences of three teachers. Winifred shares the journey of that
inquiry in the chapter entitled, Learning through Inquiry: A Recursive Path, in this
book. In August, 2004, she wrote:

The first oral presentation of the course, and the readings, were really only
laying the groundwork for the two major assignments—the narrative of how
the arts had helped shape the educator I have become, and the research
proposal. The two were intimately linked, and I certainly couldn’t have
accomplished the research proposal without having written the narrative
first...

Writing the narrative was an extraordinary experience. Having the direction
to look at how the arts had influenced or shaped me was really what made
it work for me. It made me look at my life through a particular lens. This
narrative was an inquiry, an investigation. The interview with the other
student worked for me in a rather odd way. I was frustrated she didn’t ask me
good questions about my arts experiences or how the arts had influenced me.
This bothered me immensely. However, when I came to write the narrative,
I realized that this frustration was pointing me towards what I needed to write
about and so it became a very personal inquiry.

Following the threads of my music and theatre experiences through to my
professional life in the classroom was a terrific adventure. I decided to begin
it with a really wonderful experience I had had in the past year where I really
felt like I was at my best in the classroom and see where it took me. It also
happened to be one in which I had integrated visual art and mathematics—so
it seemed ripe for an investigation of art and education. I knew from my
experience with presenting the website I had created in the oral presentation,
‘Something that inspires you and something you have made’, that if I worked
with something that I felt excited about I would be able to get at the heart of things. And I think that is really what happened. Once I looked at that experience and saw how I was something of the behind-the-scenes stage manager—how I was the patron of these students—the rest seemed to rush out of me.

The narrative allowed me to ‘claim’ myself, to recognize myself, and I think in that, I was then able to recognize and experience what it was that arts-based research could do. I began to understand how this kind of research could help me to get at things from the inside, to explore how people bring meaning to experience, how tacit knowledge becomes explicit, and how they build their knowledge.

Writing the final product for the course, the research proposal was the most profound experience. The feedback I got from Mary continually urged me to: ‘Think about what you love’, and I knew that I had to be authentic if it was ever going to work. Then I got away from writing for someone else and began writing it for me. That has to be the most important thing any teacher can do for her students. I wrote myself into that proposal. It gave me the room I needed and the inspiration and determination to include all the disparate bits of myself in there. In thinking through the proposal I knew that it had to include a narrative creation; an exploration of the kind of teaching that makes me sing—inquiry learning which is also related to my role at school as an inquiry leader; it also had to somehow relate to democracy and education.

Because I was able to be myself in this proposal rather than trying to fit a mould, I was able to put those things together in a way that seems natural and that they would flow in and out of each other in a completely sensible way. That was what was transformative, as it let me work with myself, what I know and who I am. Not only was I was able to get it on to paper in a narrative, but to move beyond that into a research project that will delve further into my own understandings and observations and allow others to do the same as I work on it. It is one thing to look into the narrative mirror and see yourself for the first time, but then what are you going to do with this knowledge you have about yourself? If the process it is to be truly transformative, there needs to be a next step that responds to my question of: ‘Where do I go from here?’ That is why I am so very keen to go to that next step by doing the research and writing the thesis.

AFTERWORD: PREOCCUPATIONS AND PURPOSES

If we understand our own minds, and the things that are striving to utter themselves through our minds, we move others, not because we have understood or thought about those others, but because all life has the same root. Coventry Patmore has said, ‘The end of art is peace’, and the following of art is little
different from the following of religion in the intense preoccupation it demands.

(Heaney, 1980, quoting W. B. Yeats, Samhain; 1905, in Explorations)

The development of a narrative, arts-based pedagogy is an ongoing journey that will always be a work-in-progress. It has its origins in what I learned in a kindergarten class, was nurtured by the other inspirational teachers I have known throughout my life, and is continually developed in my practice, my preoccupations and my purposes. This approach to pedagogy is continually being re-imagined and re-enacted in the work of creating learning communities for each new group of students I teach, in creating relationships and a community where individuals can be awakened to the fire within themselves, and can feel the warmth of the fire at their back and the presence of their soul friends by their sides. I believe that it is only when students feel the care and connectedness of relationships and community, that they can truly learn to claim themselves, and to create the new stories that will enable them to live more connected, fully integrated and meaningful lives. These conditions are especially necessary for graduate students to learn the complex, interpersonal processes of doing narrative, arts-based research, where they collaborate with research participants to explore their stories, and to interpret and represent them in meaningful and resonant ways. They are also necessary for both graduate and undergraduate students as they conduct self-study research into their own lives, gain increased self-knowledge, make connections between their personal values and purposes, and create new understandings of the possibilities available to them in their professional and scholarly lives. In the telling and re-telling of stories of the past, and in the co-creation of new stories for these lives, students can give up the stories they hold when they can replace them with richer and more significant versions that are more suited to their current environments and the futures they envision. As they do so, they learn how to create the kinds of learning communities and research projects in their own lives where others will be inspired to tell and retell the stories through which they transform what they know and transform themselves.

I have been blessed to have had many teachers who were soul friends to me, who stimulated my imagination and intellect, and inspired my love of learning, of teaching, and of the ongoing quest for meaning. Their legacy and their voices live on at a vital level in my personal life and in my professional and scholarly work. My hope is that I can inspire my students and readers as they have inspired me.