Recounting the What and Disclosing the Who :
A Heuristic Inquiry into the Connection between Identity and Literacy Teaching

Jessica Saada
Department of Integrated Studies in Education
McGill University, Montreal
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Acknowledgements

I have been privileged. Addressing the *who*, reaching in and releasing memories and stories, catching them in midair to make sense of them, is an enthralling but arduous process. My journey ineluctibly solicited and affected a multitude of others.

After years of highlighting reasons for not being able to embark on the doctoral process, one day I had a serendipitous conversation with Dr. Anthony Paré, to whom I had turned for advice. He very kindly told me to stop finding excuses. I am very grateful for his forthrightness.

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Abstract

Who am I in literacy teaching? The purpose of the present research was to delve deeper into the question of identity, to uncover in literacy teachers the connection between the *who* (who they are) and the *what* (literacy teaching). The *who*, elusive and intangible, is difficult to name or define; Hannah Arendt (1998) writes that "the moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he [sic] is" (p. 181). But with guidance from Arendt, Parker J. Palmer and Margaret L. Dobson, the *who* was understood as unique, omnipresent, unchanging in its DNA yet constantly evolving at the "moving intersection of inner and outer forces" (Palmer, 2007, p. 14). This journey is one that began within the researcher and expanded to an investigation as a group of eight current and former language and literacy teachers, individually and collectively seeking out memories and stories. The questions that launched the study were: *How does literacy teaching become a part of self? What commits us to such teaching?* With careful consideration for a variety of methodological paths, Clarke Moustakas' heuristic inquiry was selected for the journey. Despite its infrequent use in education, this method was appealing as it 1) promoted starting with a personal, internal search; 2) enabled self-study within a relational, collaborative process that held stories, first-person accounts, in high regard, and 3) focused on bringing to light the "essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). Through Moustakas' (1990) phases of initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, and creative synthesis, heuristic inquiry revealed itself as a genuine, powerful process of discovery; self-discovery, in particular. Indeed, calling out from amidst the group discussions, one-on-one interviews, reflection, reading, writing and analysis, a more pertinent question demanded to replace its predecessors: *How does our definition of self connect us and commit us to literacy teaching?* Findings highlight literacy teaching as a means to accomplish a vocation of self-fulfillment, rather than as an end point on a trajectory. They suggest that, for the participants, the fundamental commitment was not to literacy teaching as such, but to the *who*, their *who*, an indivisible whole evolving within various contexts. Through the revelations of this investigation, many more questions came into view pertaining to seeing and seeking out the *who* (implications of the research). These can affect such pressing issues as hiring, pre-service teacher training, on-going professional development, collaboration, student learning data, standardized testing, school success, provincial rankings. The questions reinforce the urgency of attending to the *who* in education. Without the *who*, there cannot be the *what*, the *what* of creating, reflecting and innovating; the *what* of evolving; the *what* of teaching and learning.

Résumé

Qui suis-je dans l'enseignement de la littératie ? La présente recherche avait pour but de creuser la question de l'identité, de découvrir chez des enseignants de la littératie le rapport entre le *qui* (qui ils sont) et le *quoi* (l'enseignement de la littératie). Le *qui*, insaisissable et impalpable, est difficile à nommer ou à définir ; Hannah Arendt (1998) écrit que « dès l'instant où nous voulons dire qui quelqu'un est, notre vocabulaire nous induit à dire plutôt ce qu'il est [traduction libre] » (p.181). Mais avec l'aide d'Arendt, de Parker J. Palmer et de Margaret L. Dobson, le *qui* s'est révélé unique, omniprésent, inaltérable dans son ADN mais évoluant constamment à « l'intersection mouvante de forces endogènes et exogènes [traduction libre]» (Palmer, 2007, p. 14). Le présent périple a démarré intérieurement chez la chercheuse, avant de devenir, plus largement, une investigation auprès de huit personnes, chacune enseignant ou ayant enseigné la langue et la littératie. Individuellement et collectivement, ces personnes se sont mises en quête de souvenirs et d'histoires. Les questions au départ de cette étude étaient: *Comment l'enseignement de la littératie devient-il une partie de soi? Qu'est-ce qui nous engage à un tel enseignement?* Après examen minutieux d'une panoplie d'options méthodologiques, le choix s'est arrêté à l'enquête heuristique de Clarke Moustakas. Quoique peu utilisée en éducation, celle-là s'est principalement imposée pour trois raisons: 1) elle invite à commencer par une recherche personnelle, intérieure ; 2) elle permet une étude de soi dans le cadre d'un processus relationnel et collaboratif qui valorise les histoires, racontées à la première personne, et 3) elle braque les projecteurs sur « l'essence de la personne dans le cadre de l'expérience [traduction libre] » (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). Par ce que Moustakas (1990) décrit comme étant les phases d'engagement initial, d'immersion, d'incubation, d'illumination, d'explication et de synthèse créative, l'enquête heuristique s'est révélée être un puissant processus de découverte, de soi-même notamment. En effet, les discussions de groupe, les entretiens individuels, la réflexion, la lecture, l'écriture et l'analyse nous ont conduit à une question plus pertinente que les précédentes: *Comment notre définition de soi nous lie-t-elle et nous engage-t-elle à l'enseignement de la littératie?* De cette investigation, il est ressorti que l'enseignement de la littératie était un moyen de réaliser une vocation, plutôt qu'un point d'arrivée sur une trajectoire. Pour les participants, le fondement de leur engagement n'était pas l'enseignement de la littératie en tant que tel, mais le *qui*, leur *qui*, un tout indissociable, évoluant d'un contexte à l'autre. Les révélations de cette investigation ont mis au jour de nombreuses autres questions liées à la prise en compte et à la sollicitation du *qui* (implications de la recherche). Ces interrogations peuvent avoir une incidence sur des enjeux pressants comme l'embauche, la formation initiale et continue des enseignants, la collaboration, les données d'apprentissage des élèves, les examens standardisés, la réussite scolaire, les classements provinciaux. Ces questions accentuent l'urgence de se centrer sur le *qui* en éducation. Sans le *qui*, il ne peut y avoir de *quoi*, le *quoi* de la création, de la réflexion, de l'innovation ; le *quoi* de l'évolution ; le *quoi* de l'enseignement et de l'apprentissage.

Chapter 1 – Introducing the Story

Truth cannot possibly be found in the conclusions of the conversation, because the conclusions keep changing. (Palmer, 2004, p. 127)

Allow me to paint the broad strokes of what lies ahead within the pages of a story that begins with 'I' and continues as 'we'.

It is a story that starts with the fact that I was never going to be a teacher, until one day, a quarter of a century had passed during which I had not only been teaching, but passionately teaching languages and literacy, and passionately training other teachers in the area of literacy. Education had seemingly chosen me… How?

It is a story in which I hoped to uncover, collaboratively with other literacy teachers, how education had chosen each of us and how literacy teaching had become such an integral and personal part of our definition of self.

The main character in this story is the *who*, elusive yet present and vital in each of us. I spent quite some time wavering on a specific definition of the who. I referred to it in various terms (self, soul, truth) along the way. I was also expressing it first as personal identity, then as the personal dimension of identity, only to recognize that it is not a fragment but a whole, the very core of identity. Palmer (2004), in his book whose title alone – *A Hidden Wholeness* – speaks volumes, expresses a similar nomenclature issue around the who.

He states that :

> Thomas Merton called it true self. Buddhists call it original nature or big self. Quakers call it the inner teacher or the inner light. Hasidic Jews call it a spark of the divine. Humanists call it identity and integrity. In popular parlance, people often call it soul. (Palmer, 2004, p. 33)

However, and this is key, Palmer then highlights that the name given to the who, whatever that may be, is quite secondary to the consideration of its existence:

> *What* we name it matters little to me, since the origins, nature and destiny of call-it-what-you-will are forever hidden from us, and no one can credibly claim to know its true name. But *that* we name it matters a great deal. (Palmer, 2004, p. 33)

So it is that the following pages move away from struggling with a name, to addressing the inevitable presence of the who, embracing that conscious, voluntary consideration of the who of the literacy teacher.

The who is not only at the heart of the story; it is the story's raison d'être. Palmer (2004) tells us that "truth emerges as we tell the stories of our lives" (p. 122) and Arendt (1998) states that the who "becomes tangible only in the story of the actor's and the speaker's life" (p. 193).

Vying for attention within the next pages, in tandem with the who, is the *what*: here, teaching, and more specifically, literacy teaching. Indeed, the reflection on the who originated as questions on the connection between the personal and the professional, the who of the person and the what of literacy teaching. The questions initially raised were: How does literacy teaching become a personal part of a definition of self? What commits us to such teaching? Through the study and

its subsequent analysis, for reasons explored in Chapter 8, they revealed themselves as inadequate, finally changing to: How does our definition of self connect us and commit us to literacy teaching?

Every story has its setting. Omnipresent in the following pages is heuristic inquiry. Moustakas (1990) states that heuristic research "refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis" (p. 9). Technically speaking, it is the foundation upon which the larger story is built, the process of excavation and the procedure for construction. But beyond offering a supporting structure, the heuristic inquiry process drives the research and takes us along a journey that begins within ourselves and returns us to ourselves following our travels abroad. In heuristic inquiry, we cannot pass ourselves by: "The process of discovery leads investigators to new images and meanings regarding human phenomena, but also to realizations relevant to *their own* experiences and lives" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9; emphasis added). Deeply human and transparent in its subjectivity, heuristic inquiry called to me.

In the second chapter, some of my memories are disclosed. They emerge from a Memory Journal I began keeping at the onset of my doctoral studies as a way to start thinking about and remembering my stories, uncovering essential aspects of myself, finding and fine-tuning my questions. I was later provoked into further writing by reading, by prompts I shared with the participants, and by the conversations held within the various group or one-on-one contexts in the study. I hesitated to insert such personal anecdotes into a scholarly piece. But Moustakas (1990) writes that: "Self-dialogue is the critical beginning; the recognition that if one is going to be able to discover the constituents and qualities that make up an experience, one must begin with

oneself" (p. 16). In authenticity, in truth, highlights of this self-dialogue must be revealed. Without this brief immersion into my stories, it would be difficult to truly understand the journey that took place and the reasons for my questions on becoming a literacy teacher, on the who and literacy teaching. The stories are two-fold, some attached to my experiences of literacy, others tied to my work as a literacy teacher. All are windows onto my *who* and provide a context for this investigation which began at that very place of seeking out memories.

Because of the nature of this work and its methodology, I can be found throughout, but the third chapter moves outwards and opens the door onto the literature. Along with several others, Margaret L. Dobson, Hannah Arendt and, in particular, Parker J. Palmer join me here, their voices of central importance. They remain for the duration of my reflection, and their work, together with Moustakas' (although he appears later), proves to be invaluable to mine. Several questions are addressed, including: Who is the who? What is teaching? Why literacy teaching? I nearly got lost in this leg of my journey, because questions beget questions, and the more I explored the literature, the more I wondered and wandered. In the end, all questions were tied to the person that we are (I am), doing the work that we do (I do), within the context of literacy teaching. Chapter 3 makes the case for investigating the connection between the who and the what.

But truly, it was my reflection on the methodology, in chapter 4, that cleared the path for me. Undertaking any major endeavour requires a plan, the foundations of which are located in this chapter. Palmer (2004) writes of "telling our vulnerable stories" (p. 123), referring to those that expose us, put us at risk of being misunderstood, dismissed, laughed at, even exploited. He talks of "vulnerable ideas" as those "that might lead us to new insights but would also leave us open to

attack" (Palmer, 2004, p. 128). Chapter 4 shines the spotlight on the who and literacy teaching through a methodology that allows this to happen genuinely, within vulnerable stories and ideas. It provides the opportunity to read about my chance encounter with Moustakas and heuristic research, not as a set of directions to my planned destination, but as a mode of being in, being a part of, and doing the research, in human vulnerability.

Chapter 5 is the concrete plan, the intention, considering the theoretical in practical ways: the "how to" of the research. Although the final destination was unknown, a map was drawn in the hopes of visiting valuable places along the way.

In chapter 6, the process moves from planned to experienced, and from *I* to *we*. Here, heuristic inquiry with others becomes a lived process, with steps that respect its phases within the real constraints and conditions of the study. People are selected and brought together, writing and reading occur, conversations are held, reflection happens, data is gathered and organized. It is a careful balancing act between being researcher and participant, between conducting research and allowing it to take place.

Chapters 7 and 8 let the data speak and give voice to the outcomes of the process. In fact, in many ways, they address the multiple voices within the data collected. The first looks into the who, the second, the what, but they both center upon the thoughts explicitly shared and those whispered in undertones, the obvious connections and those woven in less discernable thread, the stories openly told and those revealed unintentionally. In these chapters, the questions from Chapter 3 are revisited, in light of the stories told and the conversations had.

The heuristic inquiry process as described by Moustakas (1990) ends with the creative synthesis, defined as "the peak moment when the researcher recognizes the universal nature of what something is and means, and at the same time grows in self-understanding and as self"(p. 90). Under the weight of my expectations for this last phase, which I associated with finding the gem, I was unable to see the creative synthesis occurring. Chapter 9 is the treasure hunt, addressing my struggles with the creative and the synthesis, and finding delivery through poetic inspiration.

Beyond myself, beyond this study, what are the contributions and implications of this work? Chapter 10 is the place of discussion and further questions, preparing for the writing that is to come in the unwritten chapters of an on-going story. It is a plea for the urgency of attending to the omnipresent who of the teacher, without whom there cannot be the what of literacy teaching.

In the end, what matters about the pages to follow is that they describe a deeply personal journey, however one shared with others in investigation, through stories and conversations, genuinely enabled and provoked by the heuristic inquiry process. Palmer (2004) writes that, "Truth is an eternal conversation about things that matter, conducted with passion and discipline"(p. 127). Through excerpts of conversation and reflection on the things that matter, this is the story of the revelation of a truth, one that connects the who and what in literacy teaching.

Chapter 2 – Memories

We begin to learn something new with a story in mind. (McEwan, 1995, p. xi)

At the beginning of the larger story (that of the current investigation) are my stories. They are ones that came to me at various moments within the initial engagement phase of the heuristic inquiry process that has guided my research. They were recorded in my Memory Journal (all of the participants were invited to use such a journal throughout the study). Moustakas (1990), who put heuristic inquiry forward as a research process, states that "the initial engagement invites self-dialogue, an inner search to discover the topic and question" (p. 27). He underlines the importance of autobiography. Palmer (2004) writes that "telling a story expressively, as an end in itself, can contribute powerfully to our insight" (p. 124). While I searched within myself, through self-dialogue, for the significant questions that were below the surface of my consciousness, I tapped into and unearthed many of the stories that compose me. Some are woven through the journey of my research. However, in the spirit of authentic beginnings and in celebration of the initial engagement, some require immediate expression. Autobiographical reminiscences illuminated my research.

To Choose or to Be Chosen…

I did not choose education. It chose me.

My parents were the first teachers in my life, as most parents are with their children. They were also school teachers. Education was part of the very fibre of my family from my earliest memory onwards. But I was not following in anyone's footsteps. I was never going to be a teacher.

And then one day, I looked back and a quarter of a century had passed during which I had not only been teaching, but passionately teaching languages and literacy, passionately training other teachers in the area of literacy. Education seemed to have chosen me.

Teaching had begun as a sideline, as summer jobs in day camps, then courses I delivered in adult education while I sought out a real vocation. It had evolved into a Bachelor's degree, encouraged by a family attachment to education, namely my parents' passion for their own careers in this field. It was fueled by my overwhelming connection to my students, despite my persisting in the idea that this was only temporary. My piqued curiosity in language development, perhaps really a quest for uncovering the secrets to my own bilingualism, then transformed into a marked interest for research in education. While I still believed I was waiting for my true professional path to emerge, I embarked on the journey towards a Master's degree in Second Language Education, a means of constructively passing the time while searching for my true end, something I felt lay outside the walls of the educational milieu in which I was immersed. I did not know then that I was hooked, that there was no turning back. A classroom teacher for fifteen years, an educational consultant for my school board for several more, and then on loan to the Ministry of Education to deliver practical workshops to teachers across Quebec on awakening passion for reading; a published author of pedagogical resources dealing with literacy development, a vice-principal in a large high school, an assistant director of educational services, always closely tied to language and literacy development… Was education my vocation? Was I predestined to teach languages

and literacy? Were there predispositions that, if they had been revealed at the onset, would have shed light on the inevitable nature of my professional path? Were there moments along the way of my experiences that played a significant role in connecting me so solidly to education? What about myself committed me to literacy teaching?

Who Am I?

In genuine reflection on these questions, it was difficult to circumvent the existential question: Who am I? Under different circumstances, I might have answered in terms of generics (I am a woman; I am Canadian), or of family (I am the daughter of…; I am the mother of…), or of occupation (I am the assistant director of educational services). But given the autobiographical, soul-searching process I had embraced, a series of literacy-related stories asked to be heard in answer to this question of who I am. They began with memories of reading but were soon joined by those of writing, school and teaching.

Stories of Reading

Reading stands at the very beginning of my timeline, the memory of a memory of a memory. It is the feeling of being freshly bathed and sleepy but not yet ready for sleep. It is the smell of the French bubble bath my grandparents had sent from Paris, and of my mother's perfume, faint but present. It is the comfort; the one-piece pyjamas with feet. It is the closeness, the warmth, sitting atop my parents' bed, in the early years alone with my mother, then sharing the space with the eldest of my brothers. It is my mother's mouth moving along the words. I used to stare at her face, fully concentrated on the story yet fascinated by the movement of her chin, the length of her eyelashes, the colour on her cheeks. I only learned much later on that for many of the books, my

mother was spontaneously translating the English texts into French because my siblings and I began as unilingual francophones. Language would not dictate our choice of books. I remember *Petit-Bleu et Petit-Jaune*, *Sam and the Firefly* and many picture books, but also *Little House on the Prairie*, *Little Women*, *Anne of Green Gables*, every page, every tome. Never did she unduly pause, never did she stumble on a word, never did I sense a hesitation from her that might have revealed effort (for example, when translating). She did not take on new voices or add sounds, did not exaggerate expressions as one might when reading to a child. Her voice flowed over what seemed to be lyrics to a song, telling a story in the soft, smooth tones of one who is enjoying the words as much as their connections to each other, the sentences as much as their combinations, the form as much as the meaning. I did not always understand every word, but I rarely interrupted, making sense of the text from the context she was bringing, a smile here, a frown there, a lilt in her voice, a catch in her throat. She was living the story and so was I.

The memory of a memory of a memory. Reading was my childhood, and my growing up. There was no graduation from being read to, to reading autonomously, to reading to others. On some days you may crave chocolate, other days you cannot imagine life without cheese, but these desires are not contradictory (you may even want both simultaneously). Picture books and newspapers, magazines and novels have always coexisted in my life, and so have being read to, reading to myself, reading to others. To this day, my mother will read aloud and I will listen attentively, whether as her direct audience or as the lucky side beneficiary. However, while no hierarchy exists between various reading materials or situations, reading to myself played an emancipatory role in that it gave me access to contexts, stories, people and information of my very own. It is tremendously frustrating not to remember my first successes at decoding, my first experiences with autonomous reading. How is it that the most triumphant moments celebrating

the most significant accomplishments − uncovering the magic of letters turned into syllables turned into words and, lo and behold, turned into meaning making combinations − simply vanish from our memories? I do remember, though, perhaps because it is still very present today, the absolute serenity that washed over me as I would lie about with my latest literary obsession, in the house, or on a beach, or wrapped in a blanket on the front step of our house, or under the roof as the rain poured everywhere but on my book and me. I remember even being resentful (and this still holds true) when someone, anyone, interrupted my cherished moment with a book.

The memory of a memory of a memory. My mother is an only child, and my grandparents came to Canada from Paris when I was 8 years old, for the sole purpose of being close to her, to us, actively involved in our daily lives. They bought an apartment that was walking distance from our house, and every weekend we had sleepovers there. For my parents, I am assuming this gave them much needed time to themselves. For me, it was a hugely exciting event, no matter that it became part of the weekly routine over the years. At my grandparents' apartment, there was an office in which bookshelves housed all sorts of books, including those that had belonged to my mother along the years. *La Comtesse de Ségur* with *Les malheurs de Sophie*, *Les petites filles modèles*, *Mémoires d'un âne*, *La soeur de Gribouille*, and so many others, ruled over an entire shelf. Just knowing my mother had turned these pages at a time when she was not my mother (that concept seemed practically impossible to me) made them all the more enticing. Through Friday evenings and Saturday mornings, sprawled on the blue velvet couch, through pedagogical days, through sick days when my tonsils were so swollen I could not imagine ever swallowing easily again, through all those situations when I had the great fortune of being sent to my grandparents', I connected with the treasures on those bookshelves.

There were our Sunday outings with my grandfather and brother to the municipal library. The walk there varied in length, from 20 minutes to what seemed like days, depending on my brother's good will, and on the weather, I suppose (there was no weather bad enough to keep us from going). I remember feeling like a pioneer on a discovery mission. On our way, we would stop to buy chocolate (I cannot recall where). We were each allowed one chocolate bar, and choosing was an arduous task. Dairy Milk or Aero? Which would last the longest? The Dairy Milk would slowly melt on my tongue, creamy swirls seeking my taste buds and filling my entire being with satisfaction. The Aero was much lighter, its bubbles bursting on my tongue sending chocolate surprises throughout my mouth. Each time I chose a chocolate bar, I ended up nostalgically thinking of the one I had left behind. I think my brother would start eating his chocolate bar before my grandfather had actually paid for it, but mine would wait. The real delight came in the library, as I was granted the permission to wander off on my own. I would zoom in on an aisle, the aisle where I would find my books: *Fantômette*, *Le Club des cinq*. I just now realize that they were all series. Single books are great but they tend to leave me with mixed feelings: the joy of having met an extraordinary story and the sorrow that it will no longer be with me after such a brief encounter. Yes, I have always loved series, when you feel your commitment is so much more rewarding, the investment of time so much more profitable. I would carefully select the book that would deserve my full attention for the next few hours, sit in the aisle with my knees propped up to better support my book, unwrap my chocolate bar (though food was strictly forbidden in the library) and, one square at a time, one page at a time, I would savour both my treats. I don't know what my grandfather or brother did while I merged with the stories I was reading; I don't even remember how I knew it was time to leave. I do remember that the walk back, all books returned to their shelf and my chocolate bar long gone, always seemed so much longer, more arduous and less enjoyable than the walk there.

The memory of a memory of a memory. When I was ten years old, my sister was born. It was on a Saturday morning at my grandparents' home that I learned of her arrival. It was a time of change, becoming one of two sisters. And a big change was that my bedroom, situated next to my brother's and across from my parents', moved to the basement. I do not recall if I was pleased from the start at this change, but I do know this quickly became a turning point in my life, as the basement also held several bookshelves filled with vast quantities of books which were not necessarily age appropriate and most likely not destined for my reading enjoyment at the time. However, no one else's room was in the basement, so an almost immediate sense of entitlement came over me and remained steadfast until, when I was 16 years old, we moved out of this house and into another. The books, fighting for space, tightly shoved against each other, one row often hiding the other, called to me without respite, luring me to explore ideas, thoughts, stories. My parents were very strict about bedtime, but I do not remember often arguing with them about this (I wonder if they would agree), because I knew that I would quickly sneak out to the shelves, tiptoeing out of my bedroom to the family room, groping in the dark to find my latest conquest. Then, I would fly back to my room, my ears alert to any sound that might indicate someone coming down the stairs. I would leap into my bed as quietly as possible, breathing more loudly than I wanted and breathing even more loudly while trying to stifle the sound of my loud breathing. Using whatever light source I could find without turning on my bedroom light (alarm clock light, particularly bright moon, flashlight, etc.), I would sink into my book, feeling the victory of having successfully snuck around, the satisfaction of reconnecting with my own world and the anticipation of meeting the next pages. There would also be a measure of tension as I kept an ear on the stairs, just in case someone inexplicably found a reason to disturb my moment. But even this tension would add to the pleasure of my reading.

Reading is not what I do; it is who I am.

Stories of Writing

In Lucy Maud Montgomery's (2014) *Anne of Green Gables*, the main character, Anne, begs her adoptive parents to call her Anne with an 'e'. When asked why this matters, Anne responds: "Oh, it makes such a difference. It looks so much nicer. When you hear a name pronounced can't you always see it in your mind, just as if it was printed out? I can; and A-n-n looks dreadful, but A-n-n-e looks so much more distinguished" (p. 30). I remember reading this. How well I understood what Anne meant! There is something to be said about how a word looks, smells, sounds, feels. There is something to be said about the connection between those aspects of a word and the significance it holds. As soon as I began writing, I knew that I could choose the right word for a given occasion. I could, and still can, spend what might seem like inordinate amounts of time selecting a word. Once in a while, a word is so flawless, for those circumstances, that I feel the vibrations of a note perfectly sung.

The memory of a memory of a memory. I was nine years old when I received my first journal. It was bright blue, with a picture of Holly Hobby, eyes hidden by an enormous hat but bearing a permissive smile, welcoming my self-expression, tolerant of my struggles with forming nice letters and writing straight lines within its blank, unlined pages, and especially indulgent with regard to my attempts at creating literary master pieces. Here, I was allowed to write in ink and even change colours midway through a sentence. Here, I was allowed to decide that words rhymed even when they did not. Here, I was allowed to break any rule (I even gave myself the

permission to use “bad words” in my poetry… oh the freedom!). Here, I was allowed to leave work unfinished, to add words to a finished piece, or to cross off sections I no longer wanted included. In this notebook, a writer’s dream, I was a writer and writing was me.

The memory of a memory of a memory. The power of words. When I was in elementary school, I had an argument with my parents because they would not let me attend a sleep-over to be held in a tent, in someone’s back yard. I packed my bags, ready to defy the orders I had been given. But when push came to shove, I could not leave until I had expressed in writing my utter disenchantment at my parents’ narrow-mindedness in this affair. I remember setting down my carefully amassed belongings to look for pen and paper, already composing in my head. Should I start with a formal Dear Parents? Was I too angry to use Maman and Papa? What tone would allow me to feel vindicated through my letter, all the while clearly setting the boundaries for any future discussion on the topic? Should I say “I am angry”, or should I hint at it through more sophisticated and elusive words? I spent so much time designing and composing this letter. By the time I was finished, I had forgotten to be angry.

I kept journals throughout my teenage years. They were filled with letters, to myself and others, with position papers on a variety of topics, with poetry, with collections of words and thoughts. The journals were alive, accompanying me through these turbulent years of building identity. I apologized to them when they had been neglected for a few days, or when, to the contrary, I burdened them too frequently with lengthy disclosures or accounts. I thanked them for their support when they found answers with me, or when they presented me with my own words during memory lapses (“Dear Journal, please remind me not to be angry when I think JK has

taken my shoes from my locker without asking me first. Remember that the last time I thought this happened and got very mad, they were actually her own shoes that looked just like mine. ")

On my tenth birthday, my father gave me a very special present. He left it in my room. It was a large poster of Holly Hobby (there she is again). The paper was curled up with a plain rubber band around it. Curious, I rolled it out, at first surprised that my father would choose this as a gift. Then I noticed the back of the poster. There was a message. My father had written to me. He explained that it was the first time he had a child who was two-digits old, an important notch in our timeline. He told me that we were likely to come up against moments of frustration with each other, situations in which we would not see eye to eye, but that the important thing to remember was that we loved each other, and that he would always be there for me. Had he said those words to me aloud, I imagine I might have giggled, made a joke or provided a sarcastic remark. But those words in writing were charged with truth and solemnity. I was old enough that my father had taken the time to write to me. I was worthy of these written words. I still have that poster, and the words still bring tears to my eyes even simply thinking of them. I know he meant them (there has been proof over the years). And through these words, he made me realize how powerful it is to write.

I remember only two very negative instances associated with writing.

In my first year of cegep, I took an English class with SC. All I knew of this teacher was that she was a former nun. Amidst the economics and mathematics classes that were compulsory in the Commerce program I had chosen for lack of a better idea, I looked forward to the first English assignment, a creative writing task. This was not because I enjoyed homework, but because

usually English and French were where I could breathe more freely, make my mark, feel some pride. I enthusiastically devoted time to this paper and was among the first to hand it in. It was returned to me a few weeks later, with 65% circled at the top, in red. The only comment, also scribbled in red, was "Second language learner – must improve". Nothing else. No indications as to how or what I should improve. What did this mean? Technically, English was indeed my second language. But not since grade one had I been considered a second language learner. I was mortified and became terribly insecure. I felt I could no longer write, and questioned every word I put to paper. How could I gain back my quasi first–language status? I nearly failed this class, never having been directly addressed by the teacher and never having found the way to improvement in her eyes. Thankfully, the second semester teacher found pleasure in reading me, and I slowly recovered some of the confidence in writing that I had lost.

The second difficult instance was when I was a Master's student in the mid 90's. While I had greatly appreciated my courses, trying to connect them to my daily teaching experiences, I struggled immensely with my thesis. Part of the initial issue was that I wanted to revolutionize the world with my work, a small feat for a young Master's student. Once I had overcome that particular obstacle, with some guidance from family and friends who pointed out that I could aim for this revolution at another, later point in my career, I realized that my real problem remained. According to the rules of academia at the time, I could not truly include myself in my writing: no "I", no personal connections of any kind, no allusions to the person thinking the thesis. I pondered every word from the outside in, a process so unnatural to me. Looking back now, I see multiple layers of ambiguity, a false sense of objectivity being one of them, and another being the warped message this sent to a relatively new teacher (me) who was seeking improvement through higher education: the more you know, the less you are.

Stories of Teaching

It had been one week. One full week with my Bachelor of Education degree from McGill University. One entire week as a confirmed, qualified teacher… on paper. One week of feeling like an academy award winner with trophy in hand. And here I was, already hired to replace a grade 3 French teacher, full–time, until the end of the year. It was exhilarating, at first, feeling like the Chosen One.

But then reality hit. While I was able to carefully conceal my non–teacherness to the outside world, I could not from myself. Oh, I knew I could purposefully distract the students with whom I was entrusted. I could envelop them in language. After all, several summers as a camp counsellor in charge of drama was proof that I could use text and language to amuse children, engage them in constructive occupations and lead them to grand productions. I knew I was an adventurer, ready to uncover the unknown, tackling issues with that extra fire brought on by any new challenge. I knew all of this. But I also knew I was not a teacher. I had a teaching degree but had never decided to be a teacher. And the question was, how soon would my fraudulence be uncovered ?

I remember the first hour of the first day. I had arrived armed with a book. Reading would surely serve as an interesting distraction while I figured out what real teaching or learning – the kind where you do not even have a cooperating teacher (master teacher) somewhere out there as a safety net – might involve. My classroom was in an open area (a concept left over from a previous fad) and separated from the others by a burnt orange screen so dusty it looked smoky in

the sunlight streaming through the faraway window. I sat cross–legged on a desk, with the students, my students, gathered around me. I cannot remember what I had chosen to read, but I remember us laughing quite loudly for some time in utter complicity when, suddenly, the teacher next door stuck her head over the screen. Feeling her presence, I was immediately struck with guilt. I was hired to teach, not to have fun. My secret would be uncovered: I was not a teacher.

I remember the last day of that school year. The thick humidity, that made everything slow and sticky as of 8:00 A.M., would normally have made us all slightly groggy. But there was no time for this on such an important day. Within minutes of the students' arrival, my desk was covered in gifts and cards. I was surrounded by children impatient for me to read their words – written with their best penmanship – and to love their end–of–year offerings. I remember those little faces (some of them have little faces in their care now!). I remember thinking how I would miss each one. I remember a book, a Judy Blume translation, that was handed to me by a proud little hand, accompanied by a shy smile and words of triumph at having found the one gift I would undoubtedly appreciate. I remember the flash of tiny, separate memories all tied together as the last months played, fast forward, in my mind. And I remember thinking that I had pulled it off. I had so enjoyed my time with these children, had thrived on their questions, our questions, had grown from their learning, our learning. But I was not a teacher.

A memory of a memory of a memory. I was teaching grade 4. I had my own class for the year. It was November. I had begun my Master's, also full–time, and I had hesitated to take a full–time contract when it was proposed to me. But my mother had advised that I accept the offer, as positions were rare and she felt I should stay on track for an eventual permanent position. Although I was not so concerned about this (after all, I was not really going to be a teacher and

this was only a temporary occupation), there were bills to pay and I knew I would enjoy my time with the children. This was a new class that had been opened because the original one was composed of so many "coded" students (with identified learning difficulties or disabilities) that the school board had to provide the teacher with huge sums in oversize compensation. It was a small school. I had no books, no materials; I was even missing desks and chairs for my students at first. But the children were enthusiastic and loveable, and the principal was warm and supportive. I made do with what little I had, including all the books I brought from home or could borrow from the municipal library. One day I was having lunch in the staff room with the other teachers. In particular, I was sitting across from W., the teacher whose class had been split to create mine. I shared that I was having difficulty with S., a bright, dedicated little 10 year–old girl who was still unable to read. I had been trying for a few weeks to find better books, ones that would be more accessible to her, or more interesting to her, to no avail. She would look up at me with her eyes lit up, full of motivation, wanting very much to please me, but reading remained out of reach. My intent was to garner some advice from experienced teachers regarding how to unveil the mystery of reading for this grade 4 student. To my request for help, W. suddenly exclaimed: "But why?" Confused, I asked her what she meant. To which she replied, "Why would you bother trying to get her to read? Her grandmother had her mother when she was 15, her mother had her when she was 14, her older sister is pregnant. What is the use in trying to educate S.? She'll just fall into the same pattern." And she finished chewing her sandwich. That was the end of the conversation. The bell rang. I was shocked. The afternoon sped by, filled with math and music and social studies. But as I took out the book I was reading aloud to the class, I looked up at S. who was scrambling to sit close to me on the carpet. She was giggling in anticipation of our next shared chapter. How could any teacher think it right to leave someone on the outside of reading? How could any teacher discount the possibility of reading already being

somewhere in S., simply waiting to be revealed? It took many months of relentless effort, mine and S,'s, but by the end of March, she was a full–fledged reader. I remember sharing the story, step by step, with my mother the teacher. She encouraged and guided me, and had a big part to play in S.'s success and newly acquired confidence. When, at the end of the school year, my mother came to the variety show where S. performed on stage for the first time ever, I felt proud, of S., of myself, of this great group of students with whom I had shared a school year. One more experience. But I was not a teacher.

So many years now separate me from these first "real" experiences of teaching, so many teaching moments that have drawn upon various facets of myself and called upon such diverse emotions, so much time spent revelling in the fulfillment gained from my interactions with students. So much time spent repeating to myself – convincing myself? – that I was not a teacher.

Despite myself, I am a believer, an engaged, passionate educator with a vested interest in literacy teaching. This statement is the introduction to a search for some measure of understanding, not of classroom practices, but of teachers as whole people.

I am a reader. I am a writer. And yes, I *am* a teacher. How did literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of me? What committed me to such teaching?

Chapter 3 – *Who* and *What*

Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher. (Palmer, 2007, p. 10)

How did literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of me? What committed me to such teaching? These were my questions, the ones that were drawn out from my inner search, but as memories and thoughts continued to surface and connect in various ways, they pushed and pulled at my questions.

A Pivotal Moment

During my years as a language consultant, I developed numerous projects to enhance teacher support of student competency development. After having established the needs of the students at any given level across our school board, I would research the strategies deemed effective by experts (researchers and teachers) in the targeted areas, then select the most pertinent ones to propose in workshops. In 2007, as data analysis in my school board revealed a crying student deficiency in the area of literacy, a colleague and I designed the "Literacy Toolbox" sessions, a four–year, bilingual endeavour involving over 100 English and French language teachers. These sessions fostered networking among teachers and generated important pedagogical discussions among professionals on a regular basis.

One incident early on in the Literacy Toolbox sessions changed my course of thinking and our plan of action. During the first year of implementation, the focus was on reading strategies. To launch our first session, with no purpose other than to "break the ice", all teachers were asked to

describe their earliest memory of reading. I must admit I had some subconscious expectations of what answers might emerge based on my personal experiences. And indeed, some of the teachers shared a memory of someone, usually a parent, reading to them when they were very young. These memories seemed linked to an emotional or affective moment of some kind. In contrast, however, others shared with us an academic moment, such as an imposed novel they were required to read by their elementary school teacher. As the months and years of these workshops passed, two important points dawned on us (my colleague and myself) as informal but significant observations. First, the teachers who did not have an initial emotional connection to reading reported having difficulty generating attachment to reading in their students. Second, as a consequence of the first point, gradually our workshops tended towards getting to know the individuals with whom we were working and fostering the teachers' *own* literacy, mainly reading and writing, rather than simply focusing on student needs.

We had never before considered this in planning professional development. Through our careful consideration of student needs (which were corroborated by teachers as they, too, deplored student weaknesses in literacy) and our research into relevant teaching practices, we had never given thought to the individual teachers with whom we would be working. We had never thought that obtaining significant teacher input could mean uncovering more about who these teachers were as individuals. This was a turning point in my perception and conception of professional development that actually altered the course of the project at hand: the content and delivery of the workshops I was giving. More and more, I planned with specific people in mind – a novel that would interest Richard, a picture book that would appeal to Marie, a topic that would resonate with Caroline – rather than to a global group under the general heading of teachers.

With this pivotal moment in mind, there was the realization that the research questions I had allowed to emerge likely did not belong to me alone. The questions under investigation thus were altered to open up to others: *How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of self? What commits us to such teaching?* These questions shine a light on two important players: the *who* of the person doing the literacy teaching, and the *what* of teaching itself, specifically literacy teaching**.**

Who

About his book *The Courage to Teach*, Parker J. Palmer (2007), with his extensive work on spirituality, community, education and self, writes the following: " 'Who is the self that teaches?' is the question at the heart of this book – though answering that question in print has been more challenging than expected" (p. 7). I remember asking my students one day, in an informal discussion, to tell me who they felt teachers were. Granted, these were young elementary students with as yet relatively limited exposure to teachers, but the dominant answer was something to the effect of: *A teacher is a person who knows lots of things*. In that simple answer, they first pointed to the human being, but I wonder now, looking back, whether the greater emphasis was indeed on 'person', or on 'knows lots of things'. Margaret L. Dobson (2015), a scholar who explores identity in the context of education, calling attention to the meaning of education and the purpose of schooling, rightfully asks: "Can there be any question more urgent than the question of identity?" (p. 206). I had felt the insistence of the question in my experience with the Toolbox sessions, which had underlined that without attending to the person, it was extremely difficult to address the professional.

Palmer (2007), while affirming that "the selfhood of the teacher is key" (p. 7), explains that there is an issue with traditional questions in education. These focus first on the "what", that is, the teaching content, then on the "how", the method or approach, followed perhaps by the "why", the rationale justifying answers to the previous questions, but Palmer underscores that often the most important question of all stands neglected, the "who", without whom all other questions become futile, even irrelevant (p. 4). Hannah Arendt (1998), a political scientist and philosopher, in addressing the human life (*vita activa*) in terms of work, labour and action (with action being the way humans reveal themselves), writes that "action without a name, a "who" attached to it, is meaningless" (pp. 180-181). Palmer (2007) claims that "the personal can never be divorced from the professional. 'We teach who we are' in times of darkness as well as light" (p. xi). Clearly, who is central and omnipresent, so who is this inescapable *who*?

Dobson (2012) states that "deep within the heart of the educational matter, there is a persistent and determined search for self, a who that is not artificially engineered (i.e., moulded by concept and constructed by will), but originally generated and authentically expressed from within"(p. 212). Arendt (1998) discusses the *who*, situated within the being, unique and separate from physical and physiological attributes, visible in speech and action:

> In acting and speaking, men [sic] show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of the body and sound of the voice. (p. 179)

In my initial writing, I struggled with this elusive *who*, at times referring to it as personal identity, and then personal dimension of identity, but all the while uncomfortably feeling that both of these

expressions segmented what was a whole. This discomfort only increased, blurring my thoughts, as I came across literature distinguishing what was labeled as the personal and professional identities of teachers (Alsup, 2006; O'Connor, 2008). I ignored the unease because I did not understand it. I continued to hope that within the studies, I would be provided with a clearer sense of the who. Reading Alsup (2006), a professor of language and literacy education who writes of future teachers learning "how to embody a workable professional teacher identity without sacrificing personal priorities and passions." (p. xiv), I first focused on the words priorities and passions, thinking I was at the brink of uncovering the who. These words appealed to my burgeoning idea of a who close to the heart. But I became wary of the rest, "to embody a workable professional teacher identity", for this seems to leave a space between acting and being. O'Connor and Scanlon (2006) highlight, "Although teacher identity is a collective identity, the nature of professionalism requires that individual teachers find a way to integrate their sense of self into the role" (p. 2). The attention to self and the pointing to the individual within the collective appealed to me, as did the distinction made between self and role. Yet I questioned the notion of having to integrate self into role, as though it might be possible also to *dis*–integrate, to set aside one's self at any given time, in any given circumstance.

Research in the field of teaching and teacher education seems to have a growing focus on teacher identity (Pillen, Beijaard, & den Brok, 2013) and much exists describing an important connection between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional.

> While researchers view teachers' professional identity from different perspectives and put emphasis on different aspects of the concept, it always seems to involve the interaction between the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional, operating in a particular (educational) context. (Pillen et al., 2013, p. 243)

Because I was looking to uncover connection, I believed my search was headed in the right direction. But was I really trying to reconcile fragments? More and more, I doubted the notion of multiple identities or pieces of identity, ones that could be represented, ones that could divide the being into personal and professional.

Validation for my doubts came by way of Palmer (2004) and his explanation of life on the Möbius strip, whereby who and what are in continual interaction: "we are constantly engaged in a seamless exchange between whatever is 'out there' and whatever is 'in here', cocreating reality, for better or worse" (p. 47). Palmer goes on to say that "the implications of this simple truth are widely ignored in a culture that separates inner from outer, private from public, personal from professional" (p. 47), thereby pointing to a misguided culture as opposed to multiple identities. I thought of Frank McCourt (2005). In his autobiographical novel, *Teacher Man*, this long–time teacher writes: "I had to find my own way of being a man and a teacher and that is what I struggled with for thirty years in and out of the classrooms of New York " (p. 20). A man and a teacher, as two separate identities. As he recounts various episodes of his life as a teacher, he regularly contrasts what he did from the heart of the man, often feeling good in the moment, with later regrets at not meeting the bar of the cerebral expectations, that is, not following the teacher protocol. Was this an issue of multiple identities, a false pressure to bring to the table the "right" who, or a problem with reconciling who and what? Palmer expresses belief in one *who* to tap into, one *who* to consider in all conditions, contexts and circumstances. And this, I realized, is where I also stood.

Next, I came across an article by Malm (2009), a Swedish researcher who conducted a study focused on pre–service teacher education and the competencies that might be most relevant to

future teachers. What struck me is her statement that "there is a need to heighten the awareness of what it means to be a teacher with both the personal 'being' and the professional 'becoming' as essential and interrelated dimensions of career development" (p. 87). Here, I saw several elements of interest. Malm did not distinguish between various whos, but highlighted various dimensions of the what, a what here expressed as career development. McCourt would have benefitted from knowing there was no need for the teacher–man dichotomy, and that, in fact, it was all about the development of the who to adapt to the new circumstance which was teaching. Indeed, what I read in Malm's words was the implication that being and becoming worked together in the evolution of the teacher and the teaching.

Still, I remained unable to express the who in clear, direct terms. A moment of epiphany occurred when reading Arendt (1998), who writes that "the moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is" (p. 181). Perhaps the issue lay in the words, those I was reading and those I was thinking; maybe they were confusing the who and the what?

Digging deeper, I spent time with the work of Arendt (1998), who identifies the who as the "unchangeable identity of the person" (p. 193). I halted then, because Palmer (2007) defines identity as:

> an evolving nexus where all the forces that constitute my life converge in the mystery of self: my genetic makeup, the nature of the man and woman who gave me life, the culture in which I was raised, people who have sustained me and people who have done me harm, the good and ill I have done to other and to myself, the experience of love and suffering – and much, much more. In the

> midst of that complex field identity is a moving intersection of the inner and outer forces that make me who I am, converging in the irreducible mystery of being human. (pp. 13-14)

Were Arendt and Palmer expressing such divergent views? While Dobson (2012) highlights that "Arendt's perspective contradicts the widely accepted view of identity that is central to most contemporary Western educational programs and reforms" (p. 207), where identity is no longer defined as fixed, I found Arendt's thought to be aligned with Palmer's (2004) claims that "we are born with a seed of selfhood that contains the spiritual DNA of our uniqueness" (p. 32). In this description, there is both the unchangeable uniqueness of the DNA and the potential evolution of the seed.

But how do we think, speak or write of the who explicitly without naming it? Still wondering at the most accurate term, I used "self", "selfhood" and "soul" but felt that with each of these words, I was unwillingly provoking a particular slant (religious, esoteric, philosophical, etc.). I then came across one of Palmer's (2004) reflections on this "call–it–what–you–will", this:

> objective, ontological reality of selfhood that keeps us from reducing ourselves, or each other, to biological mechanisms, psychological projections, sociological constructs, or raw material to be manufactured into whatever society needs – diminishments of our humanity that constantly threaten the quality of our lives. (p. 33)

Palmer concludes that the importance lies not in how we name it, but in the fact that we address it. I understood that nomenclature was not necessary in exploring the current investigation questions. Rather, what mattered here was that attention be explicitly drawn and consideration

given to the idea of the who in connection to the what of literacy teaching. Regardless of the label we attach to it, the who is vigorously waving a flag that cannot be ignored in teaching.

In trying to define the who of the teacher, I encountered not only what I will call false whos (the label "teacher identity", perhaps), but also a vast array of interesting yet distracting whats and hows. Over time, innumerable studies have attempted to identify what teachers do, particularly what they do well in order to successfully impact student development. In the area of literacy, for instance, several researchers have outlined the discrete qualities of expert literacy teachers in the classroom (Allington, 2001, 2002; Wray, Medwell, Fox, & Poulson, 2000). These draw attention to the contents, types of resources, strategies and approaches strong teachers readily adopt for their classroom practice in the teaching of literacy. For years now, there has also been research pointing to the characteristics of good teachers. For instance, academics have highlighted the importance for teachers of reading and writing to be readers and writers themselves (Atwell, 1987; Augsburger, 1998; Commeyras, Bisplinghoff, & Olson, 2003; Hansen, 1985; Scott, 1996). A 1999 study of almost 1900 elementary school teachers found that those who showed enthusiasm for reading themselves tended to embrace practices lauded by current research, such as literature circles and discussions to favour student engagement (Morrison, Jacobs, & Swinyard, 1999). Parris and Block (2007), in their investigation of personal characteristics of expert literacy teachers, state that such teachers have a love of reading and learning. Even the contrasting studies, those that diminish the importance of teachers' personal literacy practices and beliefs in favour of other influences having greater levels of impact on student motivation and performance, agree that the personal literacy practices and beliefs do, nonetheless, play a significant role (Brooks, 2007). But I returned to Arendt (1998), who writes that when trying to define the who, "we get entangled in a description of qualities he [the person] necessarily shares

with others like him; we begin to describe a type or "character" in the old meaning of the word, with the result that his specific uniqueness escapes us" (p. 181). Were the examples of clarification that I had found in the literature in fact well–intended entanglements, attempts to outline a universal, distracting us from the uniqueness of the teacher doing the teaching? Realizing that the question of the who often brought me to a what, I decided that my next step would be to consider the what, head–on.

What

What is teaching? This may appear as a very broad question, one that could be addressed through a range of historical, ethnological, philosophical, social or political lenses. When I started my search in this direction, I thought that having taught would ease the task of defining teaching. But I was also very prudent because I saw in my readings how easily definitions could get blurred or taken in a wrong direction. Palmer (2007) refers to teaching as "the work to which we are called" (p. xviii). This seemed to corroborate my earlier affirmation that education had chosen me. Early on, Joseph A. Buijs (2005), a professor of philosophy and theology, had caught my attention with the first line of an article, a question: "Is teaching a profession or a vocation?" (p. 326). I wondered how many of us, teachers, might have given any thought at all to this question prior to "becoming" teachers, and I sensed that this was a worthwhile exploration.

Buijs (2005) writes that "how we think about teaching, what it is and what it ought to be amounts to a conceptual framework, a set of fundamental beliefs within which we understand and come to give meaning to what we do" (p. 326). This is the context in which he raises the question of vocation or profession. He states that if teaching is a profession, then it necessitates acquired

skills and techniques, qualities external to the person. On the other hand, if teaching is a vocation, it calls for characteristics that are part of an individual's internal makeup and that exist whether or not they are solicited or acted upon. Looking at what could initially appear as a dichotomy, teaching–as–profession would present a mathematics teacher as a strong or passionate mathematician who has chosen to teach mathematics, whereas teaching–as–vocation would present a person with a strong calling for teaching who also happens to have an interest, natural gift or penchant for mathematics that he wishes to share with students. Buijs (2005) indicates that a profession is selected, through interest combined with developed expertise or skill. A person chooses the teaching profession. In contrast, a vocation simply exists, an inner calling which chooses the individual rather than the other way around. Although a person may opt, or not, to follow this calling, it remains a part of his very being. Buijs (2005) also underscores that if teaching is seen as a profession, the training must revolve around skills and aptitudes to be developed. In contrast, if it is viewed as a vocation, training has to focus on the development of the person in terms of character formation and human qualities (p. 339). I thought back to the Literacy Toolbox sessions. Is the professional–vocational perspective ever considered in addressing teacher needs?

In parallel, I was reading David Whyte, a poet and philosopher who speaks to self–awareness and the importance of interior conversation. Whyte (2015) states that: "Ambition takes willpower and constant applications of energy to stay on a perceived bearing; but a serious vocational calling demands a constant attention to the unknown gravitational field that surrounds us and from which we recharge ourselves, as if breathing from the atmosphere of possibility itself" (p. 9). I linked Buijs to Whyte, and ambition to profession. I wondered when we, as teachers, explicitly look into our truth and give proper attention to the gravitational field that might

surround us and recharge us? Was the central question, how literacy teaching had become a part of self, connected to the professional–vocational perspective? Could some of the answers I sought lie in a vocation undisclosed, or in a profession inadvertently selected?

Buijs (2005) also states that the two seemingly contrasting definitions of teaching may come together. For instance, a person can respond to the calling to teach and choose to enter the profession through pertinent training. Or, a person can select teaching as a profession and only uncover later how deeply it resonates as part of his or her being. In either situation, the who and the what find a connection that enables authenticity in teaching, what Cranton and Carusetta (2004) define as "a genuine presentation of self and congruence between values and actions" (p. 21). What a powerful thought, slipped into my search for the what, that for teaching to be authentic, it might require association with the who. Interestingly, while Palmer (2007) readily speaks of his vocation for teaching, he connects it with the professional, defining what he calls a "new professional" as someone:

> who can say "In the midst of the powerful force field of institutional life, where so much might compromise my core values, I have found firm ground on which to stand – the ground of my own identity and integrity, of my own soul–ground from which I can call myself, my colleagues and my workplace back to our true mission." (p. 213)

In their review of the literature on authenticity in teaching, Kreber et al (2007) state that it "involves features such as being genuine; becoming more self–aware; being defined by one's self rather than by others' expectations; bringing parts of oneself into interactions with students; and

critically reflecting on self, others, relationships and context, and so forth"(pp. 40-41). In these definitions of authenticity, I thought again of Palmer (2004), enjoining us not to lead a life divided between who we are and who we think we need to be, or what we think is expected of us, pleading for wholeness and commitment to our inner truth. I considered the profound awareness and understanding of our who that would be required to show such strength and confidence within the what of teaching. Ted Aoki (2004), focusing on the connection and disjuncture between "curriculum–as–plan" and "curriculum–as–lived–experiences", reminds us that at times "there is forgetfulness that what matters deeply in the situated world of the classroom is how the teachers' "doings" flow from who they are, their beings. That is, there is a forgetfulness that teaching is fundamentally a mode of being" (pp. 159-160). I felt confirmed in my intent to explore the connection between the who and the what of teaching.

I reflected on the words of Maxine Greene , a teacher and education theorist who referred to teaching as a "human enterprise". She writes: "The objective of educators is to enable others to learn how to learn. If they are personally involved in what can be a most demanding human enterprise, those others – students, or co–investigators – may be caught up much more readily than if the teachers' sense–making efforts have all taken place in the past" (2011, p. 3). To this notion of teaching as a "human enterprise", requiring personal involvement, I added Palmer's (2007) definition of educating which is "to guide students on an inner journey towards more truthful ways of seeing and being in the world" (p. 6). Palmer (2007) asks the question, " How can schools perform their mission without encouraging the guides to scout out that inner terrain?" (p. 6). In the midst of the doing – that is, attending to students, content, colleagues, parents,

methods, resources, approaches and classrooms – when do we, as teachers, look within, at the very person without whom there is no such doing?

About the complexities of teaching, Palmer (2007) writes:

> If students and subjects accounted for all the complexities of teaching, our standard ways of coping would do – keep up with our fields as best we can, and learn enough techniques to stay ahead of the student psyche. But there is another reason for these complexities: we teach who we are. Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. (pp. 2-3)

Teaching holds a mirror to the soul… With Arendt's assertion that the what is meaningless without the who (action without a name), with Dobson's suggestion that it is only through recognition of the who that true education may occur, with Palmer's statement that good teaching comes not by way of the what alone, but through the who, it was with trepidation that I readied to uncover more about this vital connection between the what and the who.

The Who in Literacy Teaching

There was one more consideration in this exploration, all to do with literacy. Because the initial investigation questions emerged from me, I first referred to literacy teaching, rather than teaching

in general terms, as an expression of my path, a statement of my facts; indeed, I had become a language and literacy teacher, not a teacher of mathematics, of economics or of science. But a closer reflection and review of the literature revealed the interesting possibilities of exploring within the specific context of literacy teaching, the connections between the who and the what.

Central to these connections was reading. I thought back to my mother's voice, to the pyjamas after my bath. I thought back to the chocolate carefully selected on the way to the municipal library and to the books I snuck into my bed after my bedtime. I thought back to the day I discovered the word '*grommeler' [to grumble*[1]*]*, or encountered the word '*serendipitous'*. I thought back to the laughs, the anticipation, the tears, the compulsive turning of the pages, the thrilling solitude, the animated discussions. Reading is personal and transformational. This has been my experience, with which Madeleine Grumet would agree. An educator and scholar whose work on feminist theory and education looks closely at the public and private worlds of teachers, and at the relational involvement in teaching, Grumet (2006) states that "Reading books with other people is part of the continuing process through which relations between people are transformed into psychological possibilities within a person" (p. 212). She later writes, "When we select a story to read to a group of children, when we choose texts for a curriculum, we are extending this process of identifying what parts of the world, what relationships, creatures and events are worthy of their notice" (p. 218). That is to say that, in reading to others, we are identifying some of what matters, divulging *who* we are, sharing *who* to *who*.

[1] My translation

Of text, Grumet (2006) says that it "serves (as do other forms of art) to mediate the distance between self and other, for its meaning is both externally produced and internally sustained" (p. 221). Text and reading support both the *who* and the *what*, bringing them together even.

Also true is that every individual owns literacy experiences (good or bad), from the earliest childhood memory onwards. Referring to language and literacy teachers, Parr and Campbell (2011) state: "Regardless of whether we are teacher candidates or teacher educators, we each have a literacy past and a unique story to tell" (p. 9). I would reformulate this to: whether we are teacher candidates, beginning teachers, developing teachers, seasoned teachers or teacher educators, we have a personal history and relationship with literacy.

We do tend to forget that in–service teachers carry a past as well, one that keeps growing as time passes. As I had noticed in the Literacy Toolbox sessions, that past was as varied as the participants. Wilson (2003) highlights the particularly personal relation of individuals to their literacy background, which inevitably seeps into their work within the classroom:

> Teachers bring a gradual accumulation of knowledge and experience to the stories they read and teach in the classroom: childhood memories of authors and books, knowledge of family rituals around reading (what was read, when, in what attire, in which rooms within the family home, with whose tacit or express permission or disapproval), memories of school, church, Sunday school, and libraries, the hearing of oral stories told about oneself, relatives or ancestors, and the formation of values, including what constitutes literacy and which stories are important. (p. 106)

Just as we often refer to students' literacy background (Haak, Downer, & Reeve, 2012; p. 337), teachers have a literacy background, one that belongs to them personally.

The Secret Hidden in Plain Sight

Dobson, Buijs, Arendt and Palmer had readied me for the journey of awareness and self–awareness, the journey of exploration into the who and the what, the journey to discovering the connection between the two.

Dobson (2014) knew that the who mattered, and mattered in the what of teaching. She writes:

> How differently we might approach teaching and learning if we were to seriously consider the premise that human identity is not somet*hing* that is socially, politically and economically "schooled" and/or "constructed", but that human identity is inwardly generated as who one is, the source of creativity. (p. 173)

Buijs, with his thoughts on vocation and profession, seemed to have heard the interrogations within my statement that education had chosen me. I think he was curious to know where my journey would lead, where the who and the what would come together, perhaps somewhere between profession and vocation.

Arendt made me see that the who would not be easily discernable, and that I should not only be attentive, but also cautious not to confound the who and the what. She confirmed that the search was worthwhile, as the what is empty without the who.

Palmer (2007) agreed, stating: "in every story I have heard, good teachers share one trait: a strong sense of personal identity infuses their work" (p. 11). He was ready to light the way, enjoining me to pay close attention, writing that: "Good teaching requires self–knowledge: it is a secret hidden in plain sight" (p. 3). On the road to finding answers to the questions under investigation – How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of self? What commits us to such teaching? – through the seeking out and retrieval of "the stories of our lives" (Palmer, 2004, p. 122) what secrets might we uncover, hidden in plain sight?

First, however, pertinent methodological decisions needed to be made to best allow for the uncovering. These are broached in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 – How: Constructing a Methodology

Questions, not method, are the heart of research (Hendry, 2010, p. 73)

The Plan

Undertaking any major endeavour requires a plan. My initial questions arose from my own need to understand two opening sentences from my personal journal: *I did not choose education. It chose me.* Clearly, after a quarter of a century that I have spent deeply involved in education, there is a discrepancy between these opening remarks and the reality of my professional life. Though quite personal, this discrepancy did warrant attention through research; indeed, others might share it. Gradually, the initial, visceral questions gained definition as they transformed into ones that I wanted to raise and explore with others, in the hope of unveiling the who tied to the what: How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of a definition of self? What commits us to such teaching? These interrogations not only reached within, and toward, my own need to reveal myself, but also extended outwards to uncover myself through engagement with others and to allow others to reflect on themselves. This set parameters for the chosen methodology, as I knew it would have to support self–discovery as both a personal journey and a collaborative adventure, in interaction with others. I borrowed the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000): "We learn about education from thinking about life, and we learn about life from thinking about education"(p. xxiv), and gave them a slight twist. My thought was that perhaps I could learn about education from thinking about myself, and learn about myself from thinking about education.

A Qualitative Study

Arendt (1998) states that "The disclosure of the "who" in contradistinction to "what" somebody is – his qualities, gifts, talents, and shortcomings, which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says or does"(p. 179). In this I saw a need for means of inquiry that favour revelation and observation, while respecting open–endedness, the borderless fluidity of uniqueness. The search for the who in connection to the what was an endeavour that demanded sensory perception, acute observation and 'humanness' on the part of participants and researcher to allow "data" to surface between the lines, negotiate its way through words or lack thereof, and transpire in the most minute details of expression, both written and oral. Investigating the who in connection to the what intuitively seemed to call for qualitative work. This was the first important premise in choosing my methodological path. The second was finding the process by which to support self–discovery both as a personal journey and as a collaborative enterprise, for Arendt (1998) writes that the "revelatory quality of speech and action comes to the fore where people are *with* others" (p. 180). The third was allowing stories, memories and dialogue, to take center stage in the inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) state that "experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones. Stories lived and told educate the self and others" (p. xxvi).

All of these essential elements led me, serendipitously, to heuristic inquiry.

The Umbrella of Heuristic Inquiry

At the onset, when the questions began forming in my consciousness, I focused on an external object of research, some*thing* calling for further exploration. My thinking at the time was that I

was interested in the phenomenon of engaged literacy teaching, and that this could be examined through analysis of the person actively belonging to or involved in the phenomenon, namely the teacher. Dobson (2014) helped focus my thinking in her statement: "If we do not know who we are, how on earth can we know what we are doing?" (p. 10). It dawned on me that the what of engaged literacy teaching was of lesser immediate importance to me than the person to whom it was intricately connected, the who of the literacy teacher. Could the who be my phenomenon without being an *object* of study?

With this question in mind, I began travelling down the path of phenomenology, defined as: "…the study of 'phenomena': appearance of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience" (Smith, 2013, p. 1). I related to the notion that, when taken as a philosophy rather than a methodology, the phenomenological tradition "… is given a much wider range, addressing the meaning things have in our experience, notably, the significance of objects, events, tools, the flow of time, the self, and others, as these things arise and are experienced in our "life–world" (Smith, 2013, p. 73). I also connected with the idea that "phenomenology studies conscious experience from the subjective or first person point of view" (Smith, 2013, p. 1) which seemed to require lived stories revealing first–hand experience. But still I felt unsettled in my methodological path.

This is when I had an encounter with the writings of Moustakas (1990, 2001) on heuristic inquiry, situated "within the larger framework of phenomenology" (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Liao, 2004, p. 460). The term heuristics finds its source in the Greek word "…heuriskein, meaning to discover or to find" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 9), and as I read on, the connections finally began forming between methodology and the questions prompting me also to investigate my own

motives for formulating the questions. In fact, the first two sentences I read on heuristic inquiry caught my attention: "From the beginning and throughout an investigation, heuristic research involves self–search, self–dialogue, and self–discovery. The research question and methodology flow out of inner awareness, meaning, and inspiration" (Moustakas, 2001, p. 263). Other sentences had the similar effect of linking to the spirit of my research interest, for instance the following that addressed my instinctive attraction to the idea of first–hand experiences being told through first–person accounts: "…heuristic scientists seek to discover the nature and meaning of phenomena themselves and to illuminate them through direct first–person accounts of individuals who have directly encountered the phenomena in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985 cited in Moustakas, 2001, p. 264). While heuristic inquiry is derived from phenomenology, it is distinct in ways that were particularly relevant to me, the most striking element being: "Phenomenology ends with the essence of experience; heuristics retains the essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43). It was clear to me that the some*thing* was of interest to me mainly for all that it could divulge about the some*one*.

Djuraskovic, a professor of psychology, addresses her struggles with choosing a pertinent methodology for her research on acculturation and identity reconstruction (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010). Like me, she started off looking outwards, thinking she wished to study some*thing* external, only to realize that her questions came from within herself and that her methodology had to reflect this. She turned to heuristic research, and in her conclusion she states that she would do so again: "Heuristic inquiry is a wonderful qualitative research approach that represents a personal journey towards tacit knowing. It challenged me to use creativity, compassion, self–exploration, and introspection, and it provided me with the deep understanding of the meaning, and the essence of the significant human experience" (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010, p. 1585). It

does not appear consistent with the process of heuristic inquiry to qualify in advance the knowing, even to say it is tacit. That aside, clarity appeared for Djuraskovic as it did for me, once she understood that the methodology was not something found externally to attach to an object of research, but rather, it was an intrinsic part of the research and, more importantly in both of our cases, of the researcher. Moustakas (1990) writes: "All heuristic inquiry begins with the internal search to discover, with an encompassing puzzlement, as passionate desire to know, a devotion and commitment to pursue a question that is strongly connected to one's own identity and selfhood" (p. 40).

Given that I was seeking to uncover the who connected to the what, that I was concerned with the personal depictions of experience insomuch as they reveal personal significance of experience and lead to greater understanding of individuals, given that I had come to see myself as a focus of discovery, and others as a source of necessary, meaningful interaction and dialogue toward increased awareness and self–awareness, then heuristic inquiry appeared to be the umbrella under which action should take place in my research.

Finding the Stories

Heuristic research typically relies on the interview as the means for data collection (Moustakas, 1990). My initial reluctance to use interviews stemmed from the idea I held that the interviewer had to stand as an objective "questioner", carefully manipulating questions as precision tools to extract essential data from the words of the quasi unsuspecting interviewee. This view, while not the only conceptualization, was confirmed in several readings, among them Maccoby and Maccoby (1954) who write: "For our purposes, an interview will refer to a face–to–face verbal

interchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons." (p. 449). My wish to be an active participant and researcher at one and the same time, combined with my need to involve my personal experience within self–discovery and to further my awareness through collaboration, seemed at odds with this caricature of sorts. I then read Chase (2005) who writes that: "To think of the interviewee as a narrator is to make a conceptual shift away from the idea that interviewees have answers to researchers' questions and toward the idea that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own" (p. 226). Chase's words pointed to the interviewer as a facilitator in a storytelling process, with the narration being the way in which the story is told. This notion began to sway me, and a definition by Moustakas (1990) finally won me over as he highlights that the interview in heuristic inquiry "often takes the form of dialogues with oneself and co–researchers" (p. 46). Rather than the balance of power I originally saw between the interviewer and interviewee, Moustakas' perspective of the interview as dialogue corresponded much more to my research context and specifications, where stories would be shared in interaction as an essential component of deliberate study of the who.

Even as I began conscious reflection on my who and my own engaged literacy teaching, I was constantly "interviewing" myself, dialoguing, intensely at times, with fragments of multi–sensory memories. In this, I recognized that talk alone was not sufficient for the kind of deep and significant remembering I wished to elicit in myself and my co–researchers. In dialoguing with myself, the reminiscences – the stories I was remembering and the way in which I was doing so – were of essence. I sensed that combining a mix of writing, talking, sharing and discussing would be most conducive to gathering the kind of data that was sought in this study, that is, genuine stories and conversations that might shed light on the who and its connection to the what of

literacy teaching. Remembering and sense–making occur very differently for me according to the means of expression and the particular moment. I felt that in providing a variety of possibilities, each person might find their best access to thought, stories and memories. Pre–determined writing prompts could spark individually written memories. These, in turn, could generate conversation. Written stories, independently remembered, could lay the ground work for oral stories, for dialogue and collective thinking which could then provoke renewed writing, and so on:

> As every narrative self-account is itself part of a life, embedded in a lived context of interaction and communication, intention and imagination, ambiguity and vagueness, there is always, potentially, a next and different story to tell, as there occur different situations in which to tell it. This creates a dynamic that keeps in view actual stories about real life with possible stories about potential life, as well as countless combinations of them. (Brockmeier & Carbaugh, 2001, p. 7)

While, at this point, this was part of my reflection on methodology, these elements later became the concrete anchors of my investigation with teachers (see Chapters 5 and 6).

In discussing narratives, Brockmeier and Carbaugh (2001) link life stories to identity: "…we may conclude that the study of life narratives is not only wedded to actual and particular human lifeworlds, but turns into a laboratory of possibilities for human identity construction" (p. 8). Moustakas (1990) ties heuristic research to narratives in his statement: "Essentially, in the heuristic process, I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences" (p. 13). I considered this in connection to the words of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), who refer to Dewey: "People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood only as individuals" (p. 2). Was this not the direction I was

intending to take, using stories, mine and those of others, alone and in interaction, towards sense–making and the uncovering of the who*,* universal and universally unique? Indeed, the use of the narrative – that is, both the story and the way in which it is told – in the exploration of the who seemed key in this investigation. As Dobson (2014) writes:

> The epistemological roots of the scientific and the humanistic traditions can be traced to narrative when narrative is understood as the primary way in which humans make meaning…. If research is understood as meaning making, then all inquiry is narrative. (p. 53)

Johnson (2008) highlights that "undoubtedly, teachers' personal narratives can perform important work for teacher educators and educational researchers alike in understanding who teachers are, what they consider to be important, why they teach the way they do, and how they conceptualize their classrooms, curriculum and students' lives"(p. 124). Muchmore (2001) also states that "All teachers possess life stories in which their thoughts and actions are situated…" (p. 90) These life stories are the personal riches to be accessed from the inside out. I sensed that by drawing them out or taking hold of them, the personal narratives within this research on the who were the grounds to be explored, the first–person accounts potentially leading to unexpected findings.

Relational

Education is a deeply human commitment. As previously stated in chapter 3, Greene (2011) refers to it as a "human enterprise" (p. 3). It calls for entering into relations, with ourselves and others. As educators, we need to know who we are and who are those people with whom we are entering into inherent, meaningful relations. Whether explicit or not, conscious or not, these

relations between our life stories and experiences, values, convictions and actions, between ourselves and others, between what we think and what we feel, are part of the very fiber of education and educators. In addressing heuristics, Moustakas (1990) writes: "It is I the person living in a world with others, alone yet inseparable from the community of others" (p. 12). And so the study of the who in connection to the what attracted relational inquiry as a natural choice, always within the spirit of heuristic research and its allowances for collaboration.

"Relational inquiry is an approach which considers the relationships (a) between researchers and participants, (b) among multiple dimensions of the participant's lived experience, and (c) between the subjectivity of the participant and the phenomenon under study" (Newbury & Hoskins, 2010, p. 642; emphasis in the original). Relational inquiry can occur through collaboration but is not collaborative inquiry in that its intention has been drawn by the researcher rather than co–constructed with the participants; in addition, it does not necessarily call for action. These two conditions were important for the study at hand. First, the formal obligations of a dissertation imposed certain constraints on the research. My plan was not to stifle any creativity attached to and emerging from an approach reliant on the heuristic, the qualitative, the narrative, the relational and the collaborative. Quite to the contrary, it is that very creativity which drew me to this type of inquiry. However, as a doctoral student and researcher, I knew that there was a measure of accountability for me that was not shared by other participants. I had specific obligations and requirements to fulfill. Moreover, the self–discovery component of the research implied that I make certain decisions to remain truthful to my own passionate commitment. I therefore intended to put forth my initial questions for investigation with my collaborators. From these questions, the hope was that creativity and spontaneity would generate a number of related interrogations and deeper reflection. Second, investigating the who in

connection to the *what* was not a study that called for immediate resulting action; it was not anticipated that results would instantly turn into concrete plans. But if who we are influences what we do, then uncovering the stories that divulge our composition could provide insight into the actions we have taken and hints about the actions we might take. When Dewey (1938) states that "…the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after" (p. 27), I also understood that revealing identity through memories of experience points not only to who we are, but to who we may become – Palmer's (2004) seed of selfhood evolving over time – and is therefore at the root of potential for action.

A final argument in favour of relational inquiry as a means of involving a collaborative approach was the greater credibility it ensured. It was critical to plan for participants to look over the data and interpretations to confirm them. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) "The member check, whereby data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of those stake–holding groups from whom the data were originally collected, is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility"(p. 314). A collaborative approach allowed for this to take place on an on–going basis, and as a collaborative participant, the researcher is constantly confronted with the perspective of the other team members in reviewing the data and interpretations.

In highlighting the merits of cooperative inquiry, Heron and Reason (2001) state that they "…believe that good research is conducted *with* people rather than *on* people [emphasis in the original]" and that "the outcome of good research is not just books and academic papers, but is

also the creative action of people to address matters that are important to them" (p. 179). Findings emerging from collaboration, in a context where the participant–researchers have a personal stake in the process and discovery, raise the bar for greater depth and significance as participants who are co–researchers retrieve and construct memories and stories, both individually and jointly, while systematically validating their interpretations with one another.

The Researcher, Validity and Transparency

In qualitative inquiry, as in any rigorous investigation, there is the question of validity, trustworthiness or credibility (Butler-Kisber, 2010). Butler–Kisber (2010) underscores that in qualitative inquiry, "…no apologies are needed for identity, assumption and biases, just a rigorous accounting of them" (p. 19). It is important to thoroughly reveal the researcher and the research goals where they intertwine to form the study, to openly consider how the researcher's being and stance may impact data collection and interpretation, because: "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions" (Malterud, 2001, pp. 483-484).

Various techniques exist to distance the researcher–as–person from the research, including bracketing for instance, in which all *a priori* is laid out by the researcher before being set aside for better focus on the "real" objects of study (Davidson, 2012). However, objectivity in inquiry on the who seems artificial, even impossible. In general, it is not necessarily the best route for a researcher to bracket his or her own experiences, relegating them to the sidelines for more

apparent objectivity in research. As Strong–Wilson (2006) expresses in describing a study by Walkerdine (1997), whose memories kept interrupting her research: "Rather than trying to bracket these experiences, she used the persistence of the interruptions as a site for constructing knowledge, including critiquing the exclusion of the first–person perspective of the researcher from conventional social science theories about the working class" (p. 60). Hampton (1995) argues that "when we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous, to ourselves first, and then to people around us" (p. 52). As Malterud (2001) also writes: "Preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them" (p. 484). What is needed is for preconceptions to belong to the research in a clearly stated manner. In the present case, objectivity was not even desired because the root of inquiry was my quest for self–discovery and self–understanding; it was hoped that any preconceptions would become an explicit part of the data itself.

Transparency and reliability in such inquiry require that the researcher position herself in the research, attempting to establish her role and proposed involvement at the onset. In a reflection on her choice of methodology for a particular study, Strong–Wilson (2006) states: "What was clear from reviewing studies similar to my own was that the researcher role needed to be clearly conceptualized in advance; choices needed to be made about how I would position myself in relation to the teachers' learning" (p. 64). And so it was for me as researcher–participant, positioning myself as an initiator but partner in a collaboration for the purposes of discovery, with a personal stake in the emerging results. In truth, it was my need for research, my personal preoccupation with the nature of my career in education, my connection to emergent initial questions, that represented the driving force behind my investigation of the who. I had the larger stake in this human enterprise, and this reality could not, should not, be denied. Despite this, it is

also truthful that I wished to combine my efforts and co–contribute in a reflection with others who would not only have an openness to uncovering the who (their who) through stories and dialogues, but more importantly, would come with their own conviction for the exploration and discovery attached to this journey, a personal one for each, within a relational context.

A Self–Study Dimension

Going back to the two sentences that were at the root of my inquiry – *I did not choose education. It chose me* – it was impossible to circumvent the self–study calling within my methodology. Indeed, even collaboration would lack veracity without the acknowledgment of my distinct intentions for self–analysis.

Creswell (2006), referring to Clarke (2005), writes of the postmodern perspective whereby the researcher is repositioned away from the "all knowing analyst" to the "acknowledged participant" (pp. 63-64). As an "acknowledged participant", I did not wish to recount the stories of others but to provide a forum in which we could all tell our stories and where these could interact with each other, so that more stories or memories could emerge or further dimensions surface from the ones told. Prior to launching my study, in discussing with my mother my memory of her reading to me, she suddenly remembered stories of those moments that she had forgotten. Her stories, in contact with mine, brought other details to the forefront for each of us, in a two–way flow that unravelled a series of memories. In another instance, I was sharing with a friend a particular experience of my reading a bedtime story to my daughter, and my recounting of this event brought her to a story of her own, which then triggered significant details within mine which had

not come to mind in the first telling. Our collective engagement, interpretations and analyses of our first–person accounts were crucial in feeding the search for the who. In her dissertation, Dobson (2014) points out that, "The revelation of *who* in the telling of a 'living story' does *not* depend on narration by other. By way of *being* in the work, I am able to tell my own living story; furthermore, in the telling of my own living story, I may possibly disclose my 'real' identity to others" (p. 117; emphasis in the original). By "living story", Dobson (2014) refers to one that is narrated (with narration as the way in which a story is delivered) from the heart, with emotion or feeling, where the emphasis is on the subjective telling. My interest in a collaborative form of narrative/relational research was somewhat of a quest to uncover, at times in solitude and at times through interaction with others, at the crossroad of the personal and the professional, the lived stories of the who attached to my what.

A self–study dimension within this narrative, relational approach – truly being in the work – appeared as the means with which to openly explore this possibility. In addressing narrative inquiry, Clandinin, Murphy, Huber and Orr (2010) write about the clear presence of the researcher in the research process: "As narrative inquirers, our lived and told stories are always in relation to or with those of our participants. We do not stand outside the lives of participants but see ourselves as part of the phenomenon under study" (p. 82). However, in the case where collaboration through participation of the researcher is seen as essential to the process of uncovering data, and where the researcher is a full collaborator, self–study allows him or her to take note of her contributions in a systematic approach. As Strong–Wilson (2006) points out:

> Self–study need not be centred exclusively or even primarily on the researcher in order to be deserving of the name of self–study. It can also be conducted obliquely, such as through research with others. Moreover, these roundabout

> routes can prove insightful in ways different from adopting the more direct route of making the researcher's self the subject of inquiry. (p. 60)

She underscores: "teachers need opportunities to engage in self–study of their own narratives. By narratives, I mean those formative stories illustrative of constructions of self and other, and by opportunities, I mean sustained occasions in which to reflect individually and collectively" (p. 73). Clandinin, Murphy, Huber and Orr (2010) state that: "Narrative inquiry is the study of people in relation studying the experience of people in relation" (p. 82). The reflexive opportunities to uncover stories and make sense of them collectively can only become richer if self–study of participants including the researcher gives validity to relational inquiry, and if collaborative interaction and growth draw on individual reflection.

Turning Points and Self

In my contemplation of methodological options, I asked myself how, through these stories and dialogues, through this introspective and collaborative work, I (we) would recognize significant data. After all, it is highly unlikely that I and my co–researchers would share and discuss insignificant matters, at least not intentionally. While considering this, my attention was drawn to life course dynamics, as addressed by Elder (1985), and later Sampson and Laub (1993). These authors describe the ebb and flow between continuity and change within a life span. They refer to two concepts of interest for my investigation: *trajectory* and *transitions*. Trajectory refers to "a pathway or a line of development over the life span" (Sampson & Laub, 1993, p. 8) . Transitions are impacts on the trajectory which Elder (1985) writes "are more or less abrupt" (p. 32) and which Rutter (1996) explains "carry no necessary expectation of change in life trajectory" (p. 614). Added to this, Sampson and Laub (2005) focus on the notion of *turning*

points, or distinct changes to trajectory. They write about a turning point that it is "an alteration or deflection in a long–term pathway or trajectory that was initiated at an earlier point in time" (p. 16), a key moment that can alter a life trajectory, either significantly or more discretely, and can usually only be identified in hindsight. Nunning (2012) writes of turning points that they "…are those decisive events or critical moments in a person's life on which hinges the question of whether or not the future development will be beneficial…"(p. 33) .

I recalled the instant that eventually led to the idea of my undertaking doctoral studies: when I had asked a group of teachers what their first memory of reading was, and to my great surprise, realized that some teachers were without the emotional, "warm and fuzzy" connection to stories that they could then trigger and cultivate with their students. This was a turning point in my perception and conception of professional development that actually altered the content and delivery of the workshops I was giving, that is, their course. But it was also a personal turning point in that it led me to apply for the Ph.D. program to find my way through personal questionings and preoccupations. Bruner (1994) defines turning points as the means with which to "clarify or 'debug' the narrative in an effort to achieve clearer meaning" (p. 53) as "emblems of narrative clarity in the teller's history of Self" (p. 50). He states that "these turning points, though they may be linked to things happening 'outside' are finally attributed to a happening 'inside" (p. 50). It was then I decided that a focus for all participants and myself would be on observing trajectories and transitions, and on uncovering turning point episodes, those significant moments that mark our stories of self, in more or less apparent ways. I felt that these might contribute to answering the larger questions under investigation.

In describing their professional development endeavour Learning with Laptops (LWL) and its impact on participating teachers, Strong–Wilson and Thomas address turning points in a way that struck a particular chord in my exploratory endeavour, confirming several of the methodological orientations I had adopted:

> Bruner (1994) further commented on the close relationship between how a narrative is told and identity construction, noting that this relationship is often overlooked. While turning points connect with a particular moment or period of time, their significance is often appreciated later, as a person looks back. Turning points shape the telling of a life story and thus, the narrator's perception, such that the story (and the events it describes) comes to be told in a particular way. Turning points are best detected in self–narration, Bruner claimed, because they are constructed by the self and through memory. (Strong-Wilson & Thomas, 2012, p. 49)

As I readied to investigate the who in connection to the what, seeking and unveiling stories and memories, mine and others', in (interactive) solitude and in collaboration – as I prepared to delve into the questions that compelled me both as researcher and participant, in fact, to the point of engaging me as both simultaneously – I waited to see if in trajectories and turning points lay answers to how education chose me, chose each of us, and how literacy teaching had become such an integral and personal part of my – our – definition of self.

With a theoretical path having been carved out within various methodological possibilities, the next leg of the journey, discussed in Chapter 5, involved detailing its architecture and landscaping: planning the method. How would I proceed with my investigation?

Chapter 5 – Concrete plans and practical considerations

A story does not need to become a puzzle with a solution or a fable with a moral in order to do its problem–solving work in our lives (Palmer, 2004, p. 125)

Anticipating the Study

With the belief that Palmer (2004) was on my right, whispering the words: "When we catch sight of the soul, we can survive the blizzard without losing our hope or our way" (p. 2), that Arendt (1998) was on my left, reminding me that "although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure" (p. 180), and that Moustakas stood just in front, leading the way with heuristic inquiry and inspiring the plan, I now felt well–equipped to map out the research, on paper. With heuristic inquiry as the selected methodology, I knew the plan for the investigation (see Table 5.1) would be influenced by its six phases, as iterated by Moustakas (1990):

1) The initial engagement phase, where "the question takes form and significance" (p. 27);
2) The immersion phase, where we are enabled to "come to be on intimate terms with the question – to live it and grow in the knowledge of it" (p. 28);
3) The incubation phase, where we retreat from "the intense, concentrated focus on the question" (p. 28);
4) The illumination phase, the "breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question" (p. 29);
5) The explication phase, where we "fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning" (p. 30);
6) The creative synthesis phase, where we are "challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis" (p. 31) .

TABLE 5.1 – OVERVIEW OF PLANNED INQUIRY PROCESS

TIMELINE	WHO and WHAT	Data collection
Step 1 (Week 1)	**INITIAL ENGAGEMENT** Potential participants approached (purposive sampling). Questions under investigation shared.	
Step 2 (Week 2)	Information delivered to all interested candidates; process detailed and commitment established.	
Step 3 (Week 2)	Prompts and copy of *Teacher Man* (McCourt, 2005) mailed to all committed participants who begin thinking, reading and writing in their triple entry journal.	
Step 4 (Week 5)	**IMMERSION** First collective session: book talk, beginning of autobiographical writing in Memory Journal (continued at home) and discussion.	Audio-recording of session 1 (2 hours) Research log
Step 5 (Week 7)	Second collective session: timelines and continued autobiographical writing in Memory Journal (pursued at home) and discussion.	Audio-recording of session 2 (2 hours) Timelines Research log
Step 6 (Weeks 7 –12)	**INCUBATION** Continued reflection and journaling; initial review of recordings; individual interviews/dialogue.	Audio-recordings (of 7 individual interviews) Research log
Step 7 (Week 12)	**ILLUMINATION** Third collective session: reconnection with questions under investigation; emerging fragments of answers. Continued review of recordings and beginnings of analysis.	Audio-recording of session 3 (2 hours) 8 Memory Journals (including triple-entry journal) Research log
Step 8 (Week 12 –)	**EXPLICATION** Full analysis of all recordings, Memory Journals and notes by principal researcher with ongoing communication as needed with participants.	Communication with participants as needed (email, telephone)
Step 9 (Following explication phase)	**CREATIVE SYNTHESIS** Creative representation of findings.	

Moustakas (1990) describes each phase as a natural progression from the next, which cannot be willed, artificially manufactured, or even concretely plotted along a specific timeline, seemingly contradicting the idea of a detailed plan. Moreover, it might seem paradoxical, in any case, to try to anticipate the course of a study focused on the intangible and elusive *who*. Had this study only involved myself, plan and realization likely would have fused into one and have thus been recounted within one chapter. However, I was conscious of the particular conditions of a study with others, namely the importance of genuine buy–in of all those involved to allow for a

measure of co–investigation, and the reality of time constraints to enable full commitment and engagement from participants. I also recognized that the investigation bore a different weight for me than the others. This called for a precise plan, envisioning the voyage before asking others to come on board. It therefore seems pertinent to expose first and separately the careful anticipation and organization of steps that were guided by Moustakas' phases yet tailored to this particular research. This chapter details how the investigation was anticipated to take place in keeping with the heuristic inquiry process. Chapter 6 then describes how the investigation actually unfolded, including reflection on how the reality diverged from or exceeded the plan.

Participants

Participants would be selected through criterion sampling, as a type of purposive, non–probability sampling (Palys, 2008). This approach was pertinent within this qualitative study because its goal was not generalizability, and because there were particular characteristics of participants that were deemed essential to the research. Moreover, selection by the initiating researcher, myself, would ensure a more systematic evaluation of eligibility based on the given criteria that could otherwise be diversely interpreted. The participant group would include no more than eight individuals, with male and female representation, English and French speakers, from elementary and high school settings in Québec (Canada). Although somewhat arbitrary, the number of participants was established with the intent of depth versus breadth group discussions, while accounting for the unwanted but possible reality that individuals might withdraw from the study throughout the process. As well, there was an awareness on my part that the final count would also depend on the number of participants who met the established criteria and were fully willing to commit.

To be considered, participants would either be currently teaching or have done so for a number of years, defining themselves as language and literacy teachers. They would be people who openly spoke of using or having used, in their classrooms, real books and reading materials, real life communication situations rather than solely textbooks or materials specifically designed for pedagogical use. They would be passionate about literacy, with an unquenchable thirst and enthusiasm for reading, an intrinsic desire to communicate through varied means including, but not limited to, writing. Finally, they would be people who welcomed as their own the larger questions under investigation: How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of a definition of self? What commits us to such teaching?

Initial Engagement

In light of Moustakas' (1990) first phase of initial engagement that "invites self–dialogue, an inner search to discover the topic and question" (p. 27), it was planned that each candidate would be individually approached for possible participation approximately one month prior to the onset of the study. The questions at the heart of the investigation would be clearly stated from the start. In this way, and in keeping with ethical research procedures, every candidate would have the opportunity to ask questions freely, without concern for what others might do or think, and to reflect on whether the questions under investigation had sufficient personal meaning and appeal to draw them in. A brief meeting would take place with those who, following this initial reflection, decided that they were indeed interested in participating. The goal of this meeting would be to present the investigation and outline its process. It would be explained that all sessions throughout the investigation, collective discussions and one–on–one conversations alike,

would be audio recorded and transcribed for purposes of analysis. Audio recording was selected as the less intrusive method, the least likely to affect discussion in a group setting.

In thinking of the process of initial engagement for participants other than myself, for whom the present study would not have emerged as their own internal quest, I struggled with two issues. The first was how, on an individual basis, to provoke deeper attachment and thinking connected to the questions at stake; the second was how to create a collective atmosphere of willing and authentic discussion on the connection between the what and the who. I then came across Grumet's words about people sharing stories in a research context: "we are not protected by the expectation of reciprocity that good friends share over time as they can with good reason expect to misunderstand, misinterpret and violate each other's confidence as they themselves have been misunderstood, misrepresented and violated" (1987, p. 323). I was reminded of the artificial nature of research that can hinder comfortable and "real" private reflection, and the divulging of personal stories essential to my investigation. I could bring people together who I believed would naturally wonder, contemplate and connect. But in truth the investigation would not have begun as their own, and for the most part they would be strangers or colleagues at best, who could not be expected to dive spontaneously into their inner selves and memories, or into the stories of others in the way that was required for the task at hand. Palmer (2004) underlines that the "soul is so powerful that we must allow ourselves to approach it, and it to approach us indirectly. We must invite, not command, the soul to speak" (p. 92).

With this in mind, I searched for a way to create an inviting space for the who, a dynamic forum for reflection, talk and writing, one that would inspire safe, collegial discussion and genuine interaction. I looked for the means to enable and promote what Grumet (1981) refers to as

"excavation" (p. 122), meaning the critical uncovering, and Wilson (2003) coins as "bringing memory forward" (p. 28), referring to looking to the past in order to move forward. Palmer (2004) explains: "we achieve intentionality… by focusing on an important topic. We achieve indirection by exploring that topic metaphorically, via a poem, a story, a piece of music, or a work of art that embodies it." He calls these vehicles of exploration "third things" (p. 92). He says that "mediated by a third thing, truth can emerge from, and return to, our awareness at whatever pace and depth we are able to handle – sometimes inwardly in silence, sometimes aloud in community – giving the shy soul the protective cover it needs" (p. 93). In the hope that the hidden *who* might make its appearance through a third thing, so it was that I planned to begin with focusing not on ourselves, but on someone outside of our group whose story might possibly connect with ours, either in similitudes or on divergences.

Immersion

I decided that the study would begin with the reading of an autobiographical novel, *Teacher Man*, by Frank McCourt (2005). Across the years, I have used books in a multitude of contexts and with a wide variety of intents. A used copy of *Teacher Man* found at a book sale had made its way to me through my mother, as books tend to do, for recreational purposes. The title had immediately attracted my attention, separating the teacher from the person, raising questions about the who and the what. Certainly another book might have appeared at the right time and the right place. However, this is the one that did, just as I was designing the study. As a teacher and storyteller recounting his own personal life path through a 30–year teaching career pebbled with a variety of critical incidents, McCourt seemed to be the perfect individual through whom we might launch our discussions and reflections.

Each participant would receive a copy of the novel (in French or English, as requested) to read on his or her own before a first collective meeting, with the task of keeping track of any moments or passages that seemed noteworthy. Participants would be invited to observe McCourt's trajectory, with transitions and turning points (Elder, 1985; Sampson & Laub, 2005), as reflected in his self–stories, using what Wilson (2003) refers to as a "triple–entry journal" (p. 133). This is a page split into three columns (see Figure 5.1). The first column is dedicated to reference information for the noteworthy section of the book (page number, first and last words, etc.). In the second column, each participant includes his or her immediate responses or notes to do with the highlighted section. The third column is reserved for connections with the participant's own experience; in this case, I planned for it also to include comments or questions brought up during the group discussion on the novel scheduled to take place in the first collective meeting.

Figure 5.1 – TEMPLATE FOR TRIPLE ENTRY JOURNAL

PAGE NUMBER	EXCERPT (can be simply first and last words of section if too long)	THOUGHTS
p. 43	« From the first... long. »	Funny that he could not name what he was interested in but he was headed in that direction from the start. So like me...

Prior to the in-person launch of the study, in keeping with Moustakas' immersion phase (1990) whereby the researcher "lives the question"(p. 29), I would also send the participants a series of prompts – originally inspired by a list provided by Dr. Teresa Strong Wilson and, through modifications and additions, fashioned along the way of my own emerging reflection – around which to envelop their thinking, moving from initial engagement to the process of immersion

(see Figure 5.2). They would be informed that these prompts were informal but would be used throughout the study to help guide their focus in their reading of McCourt's autobiographical stories, to provide inspiration or food for thought for individual writing, story and memory retrieval, as well as to re–energize collective discussions where required.

Figure 5.2 – SAMPLE PROMPTS

Literacy Autobiographies: Sample Prompts

- How would you describe your relationship to/with language from your early years to today?
- *Which stories do you remember best from childhood? What is it that you remember about them? (This could include books, but also oral stories, family stories, songs, and dramatic play.)*
- *What are your earliest memories of reading? Did you have a favourite book or story?*
- *What are your earliest memories of writing?*
- *How would you describe the role that writing has and has had in your life over the years?*
- *When and where did your most memorable reading experiences occur, both within and outside of school? Who participated in these experiences—parents, teachers, peers, siblings?*
- *What kind of reader were you as a child and what kind of reader are you presently?*
- *What do you look for in a good book to read in your own time? How do you choose the books you read?*
- *What are your own experiences of school with regard to literacy (reading, writing, oral language)?*
- *Were there literacy experiences (books, people, places) that you wish you could have had, within or outside of school?*

I added to my plan that all participants would be sent a Memory Journal, that is, a notebook in which they would keep their triple entry journal and which they would use for writing throughout the study. Taylor (2000) writes: "There is value in reflection as it turns an unconsidered life into one which is consciously aware, self-potentiating and purposeful" (p. 10). As discussed in Chapter 4, the intent was to provide participants with another means of expression, one to engender deeper, on-going reflection coming from the inside out, one in which stories and thinking could be revisited at any time. Wood (2013) states about written reflection that

"recording this process of exploration and insight in a journal allows each discovery to build upon the previous one…" (p. 10). Within this journal, writing would be given free rein, in response to prompts, in answer to questions raised individually or collectively, in reaction to stories heard and shared. In consenting to participate in the study, individuals would authorize the use of this notebook by me, as the initiating researcher, for the purposes of analysis and dissemination of findings, under pre–established conditions of confidentiality.

The first meeting was planned to begin as a book talk of sorts, with the aim of getting to know one another and starting on our journey through the analysis of McCourt's life. We would use the prompts provided to further our analysis of noteworthy sections of McCourt's autobiography, and the third column of our triple entry journals to promote further discussion. I decided that as a final task in this first session, perhaps provoked or inspired by the conversation around McCourt's stories, participants would begin writing about their own memories and stories. We would briefly regroup to touch upon the emergent writing before ending the session, and then all participants would be encouraged to keep writing on their own before the following session that would take place within a two–week period. The intent behind including this particular interval was to allow participants the time to have accumulated some writing and thoughts, without diluting, through too much time, the connections, impressions and reflection constructed in the first meeting.

After careful consideration, I planned for the second meeting to take us (the participants) immediately into our own memories and stories. Using post–its on a long strip of paper, this session's autobiographical work would begin with each participant building a cursory timeline of

the events, personal and professional, leading to who they were (or perceived themselves to be) at that moment in time.

In addressing autobiographical work, Rubin (1986) cautions against the organization of memory along a timeline, stating that perhaps the timeline should be built according to the memories retrieved and that the temporal notion is of greater importance than the actual calendar markers (p. 13). In the present case, if we followed the set plan, the process of memory retrieval would have already begun through writing, and the use of a timeline would be to provoke access to and reflection on memories through a different entry point than either the journaling or response to *Teacher Man* (McCourt, 2005). In the social sciences, for instance in memory work for counselling, timelines are used for this very purpose: "In starting any memory work, it is useful to construct with the survivor a timeline on which significant life events are plotted. This can be seen as a working document to which new memories can be added as they emerge" (Sanderson, 2006, p. 260). In step with Rubin (1986), I decided the timeline would not focus on dates but on events within a general sequence and along a rudimentary trajectory. I planned that, following the construction of our timeline, we would take a few minutes to share it with a partner and add to it as we wished in light of our brief dialogue. We would then pursue our writing in our journal, to read what was already written and generally bathe in our own reflection before beginning the group conversation. A collective discussion was intended to follow, opening the floor to questions, requests for clarification, and so on, resorting to initial prompts where necessary.

Incubation

There would be a planned gap of one month before the next communal step. I would focus on the recordings, taking notes on my own questions and thinking. In the meantime, each participant would have the possibility of further remembering, of pondering over what had thus far transpired, of pursuing writing, of allowing questions, thoughts, further ideas, stories and memories to emerge. This was to be linked to the incubation phase that Moustakas (1990) describes as "the process in which a seed has been planted" (p. 29) and in which, though we are not deliberately focused on it, "growth is taking place" (p. 28). I interpreted this phase as one in which action is not entirely voluntary, where evolution happens implicitly rather than solely through conscious thought or action. However, I did decide on one deliberate action in the midst of this incubation, which could appear as an interruption but that I put forth in my plan as a means of enriching the incubation phase: the one–on–one interview (again, I am reluctant to involve this word for the perception of formality it might bring). Each participant would be invited to meet with me at a convenient time and place prior to the final collective meeting, for a more in–depth dialogue around the established prompts and any stories or elements of interest that I would have noticed as emerging from the transcriptions of our collective sessions. All interviews would be recorded (audio–recording) and transcribed.

Illumination

As described by Moustakas (1990), "illumination opens the door to a new awareness, a modification of an old understanding, a synthesis of fragmented knowledge, or an altogether new discovery of something that has been present for some time yet beyond immediate awareness" (p. 30). In a purely individual quest, I understood that this phase might, as per the words of

Moustakas (1990), occur "naturally when the researcher is open and receptive to knowledge and intuition" (p. 29). However, in a collective enterprise, it was clear that not all participants would reach this enlightenment at the same time and in the same way. For the present purposes, I therefore preferred to describe the illumination phase as the movement from meditation on the essence of a question to a more formal, focused attention to possible answers. In the current investigation, while I anticipated that the incubation phase would allow us the personal space for contemplation and introspection, I thought the illumination phase would bring the different conversations and stories, the trajectories, transitions and turning points, the individual whos, to the table, returning us collectively to the questions under investigation: How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of a definition of self? What commits us to such teaching?

In discussing what they label as "discovery", Taylor et al (2016) state that "in qualitative studies, researchers gradually make sense of what they are studying by combining insight and intuition with an intimate familiarity with the data" (p. 270). In a study conducted under heuristic design, the questions manifest themselves from within the researcher and inhabit his very being throughout the entire process. Thus, there is constant reflection and juggling of data, even if implicitly, in relation to these questions. But it is the sense–making piece that begins making its way to the forefront in the illumination phase. Butler–Kisber (2010) writes:

> Researchers often refer to the research process in stages…This, of course, is a false and linear description of what is an iterative and complex process. Analysis is going on from the outset – based on what the researcher brings with her to the inquiry, what she pays attention to and selects out of what she is hearing, seeing, and recording, and how the field texts are constructed. (p. 30)

Heuristic inquiry outlines a process for the analysis of data, one that focuses first on one participant (or co–researcher) at a time: "In the first step in organization, handling, and synthesizing, the researcher gathers all of the data from one participant (recording, transcript, notes, journal, personal documents, poems, artwork, etc.)" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 51). As it was planned that a great portion of the data accumulated within the current study would be through group discussions, where participants were interacting with one another, I was concerned about both the practicality of focusing on one participant at a time and the integrity of the findings that would be derived from what I felt would be the artificial isolation of individuals. I also worried that the analysis process proposed through heuristic inquiry with regard to the sorting of data was somewhat lacking in clarity: "Then, after reviewing again all the material derived from the individual, the researcher takes notes, identifying the qualities and themes manifested in the data" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 51). How would the qualities and themes be identified and sorted, and how would I ensure explicitness of the process? Seeking support in this, in my plans I chose to borrow from the constant comparative method which "allows researchers to make comparisons across individual experiences, events, and activities …" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 47). The constant comparative method is a type of inductive analysis whereby the data is given the floor and "what is important to analyze emerges from the data itself "(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 116). I could have looked to phenomenological analysis, given its close relation to heuristic inquiry. However, as previously indicated, I was not exploring a phenomenon, but the people involved in it. Moreover, Butler–Kisber (2010) expresses that: "Phenomenological inquiry continues to face questions…about whether 'bracketing' out presuppositions is ever really possible to implement" (p. 60). Having rejected bracketing in an earlier chapter as inappropriate to this exploration, phenomenological analysis was set aside.

After each discussion, group or individual, I planned to attend to the recordings and transcripts in order to eventually have themes or, as Maykut and Morehouse state: "recurring words, phrases and topics in the data" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 122), reveal themselves. I intended to use a research log to keep track of my work along the way. This would be the beginnings of what Butler–Kisber (2010) calls the "coarse–grained phase":

> where the researcher really gets to know her field texts. It involved close readings and rereadings or listening and viewing, dialoguing with herself about what is being revealed, writing reflective and analytic memos and/or keeping a journal or log, and playing with broad categories in which different portions of texts can be placed, at least temporarily. (pp. 30-31)

Butler–Kisber (2010) goes on to write about the coarse–grained phase that "it may include going back to the participants to observe further and/or ask questions to help guide the process" (p. 31). With this in mind, I decided I would bring to the final collective session any pertinent reflections or questions having emerged from this first conscious look into our data. Our third session was planned as a reconnection with the questions under investigation. The goal would not be to answer the questions, but to see if fragments of answers, pieces of the puzzle, had emerged**.**

Explication

Devising the next steps in the study provoked much dilemma for me, as a conflict arose between my theoretical desire to include participants fully in every phase of the heuristic inquiry design

and my consideration for the reality of the research context and constraints, namely the investment required of other participants in contrast with my doctoral requirements.

The explication phase, as stated by Moustakas (1990), is the pursuit of "a full elucidation of the descriptive qualities and themes that characterize the experience being investigated" (p. 31). In other words, it is to continue what began in the illumination phase, to make sense of existing information that has exposed itself to us over time, with or without our complete acknowledgment. Moustakas (1990) highlights that in the explication phase "a more complete apprehension of the key ingredients is discovered" (p. 31). The investigative journey belonged to me in a way that could not be fully shared with the others in the current context. As such, I decided that this phase and the next would be undertaken by myself, as principal researcher, in consultation with other participants as needed. Following the process of collective sessions and interviews, I, as initiating researcher, would collect all Memory Journals and review these, along with the transcriptions and any notes taken, moving from the coarse–grained to the fine–grained analysis: "when the researcher looks even more closely" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 31). With the research questions in mind, I planned to stay atuned to any connections to the main questions under investigation, to trajectories with any transitions or turning points. I would communicate by email or telephone with members of the research team, either individually or collectively, to pose any further questions that might emerge, to verify my understanding and to confirm my interpretations. I would also make it clear that they could communicate with me at any time if they had any added ideas or revelations that could be of importance to the study.

Creative Synthesis

In heuristic inquiry, the explication process, with its careful analysis of data towards answering the questions under investigation, is supposed to lead to a creative synthesis (Moustakas, 1990). Moustakas (1990) says this "usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples, but it may be expressed as a poem, story, drawing, painting, or by some other creative form" (p. 32). This seemed well–aligned with what Butler–Kisber (2010) writes of what follows the coarse–grained and fine–grained analysis: "The write–up is another analytic layer. Writing shapes the thinking and doing and gives nuances to the work" (p. 31). In my plans, I could not commit to the write–up or to the form of the creative synthesis as I believed this would be artificial and contrary to the spirit of my study; a true synthesis would reflect the process undergone and the real findings, both of which did not yet exist (see Chapter 9 for my creative synthesis).

Going from Plan to Realization to Beginnings of Analysis

Feeling empowered by detailed planning, I moved into the investigation with trepidation. I knew that, as in teaching, the best laid plans also require a measure of flexibility. What surprises would I face? This question was all the more relevant in addressing the *who*. Touching base with Moustakas' phases, Chapter 6 recounts how plan turned into action as the study unfolded, as our stories found their way to the light. It also provides an initial look at the beginnings of the analysis process, in dialogue mainly with heuristic inquiry, but not exclusively so.

Chapter 6 – The study

We find common bonds in the shared details of the human journey (Palmer, 2004, p. 124)

Carrying Out the Plan

As planned, there was a group of people brought together with the intent of real conversation under contrived circumstances. The present chapter interweaves my research notes and the telling of the story of this investigation, with attention to the phases of heuristic inquiry that had been envisioned (see Chapter 5) and were now undertaken.

We were a varied group of eight individuals, current or former teachers: two men, six women, four with mainly elementary teaching experience, four with principally high school experience. Four of us identified ourselves as francophones and the four others claimed English as their mother tongue (though everyone was fluently able to participate in bilingual discussion). Two were current teachers, two were retirees, one was a publisher, one a pedagogical consultant, one was on loan of service to the Ministry of Education and one worked as an administrator. I had planned for the possibility of individuals withdrawing from the study and, indeed, one of the women left the group early and another joined the group late, both due to unexpected family obligations (with their permission, their data was nonetheless included in the findings[2]).

An adjustment was necessary even at the start. Although I had planned to have an initial group meeting with those who would decide that they were indeed interested in committing to the study, scheduling was a serious issue that threatened the feasibility of the study. At the request of

[2] In the end, 6 of the 7 planned individual interviews were indeed conducted, and 7 of the 8 potential Memory Journals were collected.

the majority, it was promised that the study would be entirely conducted before the start of the summer holidays, so we had to keep to a strict timeline. As the goal of this preliminary group meeting had been mainly to give an overview of the planned process, this was instead done individually, to suit specific availabilities before candidates formalized their commitment.

Palmer (2007) writes about "a secret hidden in plain sight" (p. 3). And we, the participants in this investigation, were going to uncover the secret. There was a concrete map for conducting this study, but how was it that genuineness could be hoped for in this discussion within a planned, prepared, researched undertaking? I was not sure myself, as the behind–the–scenes maestro. I was also a participant. How were we going to reach for the core of ourselves, our who? How were we going to share, not just words but spirit and essence, that somewhat elusive, intangible, difficult–to–capture, true voice that does not always fit inside established words? And all this in a few, organized group sessions combined with a one–on–one interview with each participant[3]. This is the story of the plan as it materialized (see Table 6.1 for overview).

[3] For all sessions, collective and one-on-one, two recording tools were used at once, one ipad (using Alon Dictaphone) and a laptop computer (using Lecture Recorder), to provide backup in the event of a technical failure.

Table 6.1 – OVERVIEW OF THE INQUIRY PROCESS[4]

TIMELINE	WHO and WHAT	Data collection
Step 1 (Week 1)	**INITIAL ENGAGEMENT** Potential participants were approached (purposive sampling). Questions under investigation are shared.	
Step 2 (Week 2)	Information was delivered to all interested candidates; process was detailed and commitment was established.	
Step 3 (Week 2)	Prompts and copy of *Teacher Man* (McCourt, 2005) were mailed to all committed participants who began thinking, reading and writing in their triple entry journal.	
Step 4 (Week 5)	**IMMERSION** First collective session: book talk, beginning of autobiographical writing in Memory Journal (continued at home) and discussion.	Audio-recording of session 1 (1hr 49 min.) 1 Research log
Step 5 (Week 7)	Second collective session: timelines and continued autobiographical writing in Memory Journal (pursued at home) and discussion.	Audio-recording of session 2 (1hr 31 min.) Timelines 1 Research log
Step 6 (Weeks 7 –12)	**INCUBATION** Continued reflection and journaling; initial review of recordings; individual interviews/dialogue.	Audio-recordings (of 6 individual interviews – app. 1 hour each) 1 Research log
Step 7 (Week 12)	**ILLUMINATION** Third collective session: reconnection with questions under investigation – emerging fragments of answers. Continued review of recordings and beginnings of analysis.	Audio-recording of session 3 (1hr 42 min.) 7 Memory Journals (including triple-entry journal) 1 Research log
Step 8 (Week 12 –)	**EXPLICATION** Full analysis of all recordings, Memory Journals and notes by principal researcher with ongoing communication as needed with participants.	Communication with participants as needed (email, telephone)
Step 9 (Following explication phase)	**CREATIVE SYNTHESIS** Creative representation of findings.	

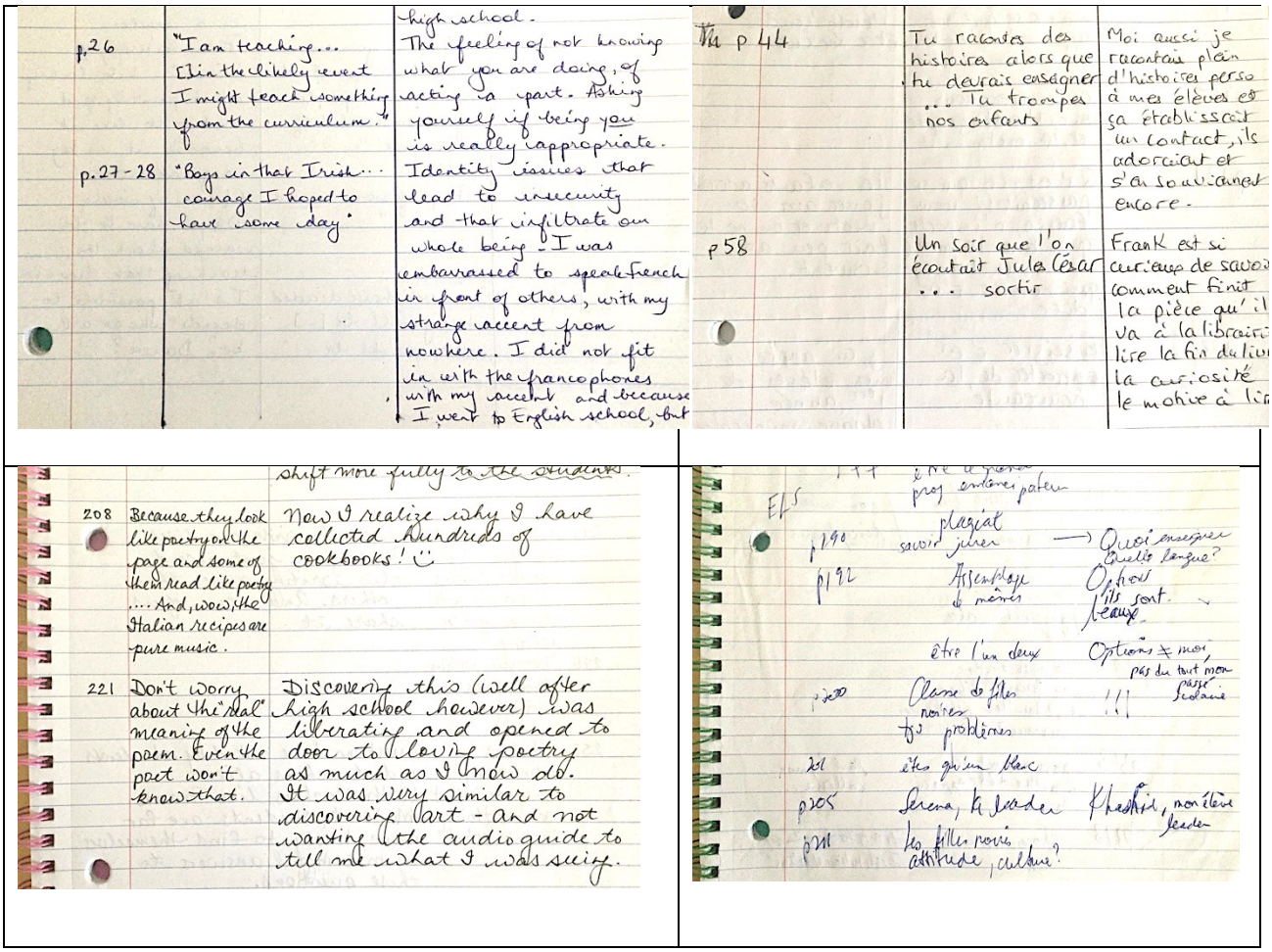
Coming Together – the Immersion Phase

We entered the immersion phase (Moustakas, 1990), holding our first collective meeting under the pretence of a book talk. I use the word pretence because it occurred to me quite quickly that while we all seemed genuinely interested in discussing Frank McCourt's *Teacher Man* (2005), an autobiographical story of McCourt's life path focusing on his years as a teacher, we all knew we

4 Table 6.1 is a repetition of Table 5.1 (Chapter 5), but with added details: duration of each collective session and of the one-on-one interviews, numbers of Memory Journals collected, number of research logs kept.

were coming for ourselves and about ourselves. In keeping with what Palmer (2004) refers to as "third things", meaning those we use as mediators in the search for truth, this proved not to be a random book, for a random conversation. We arrived with our Memory Journals, already partially filled with the triple entry journal we had kept as we read McCourt (see Figure 6.1). Clearly, having read the life story of another teacher had already provoked us into looking inward, and served as our common reference. Was this why the conversation took flight almost immediately?

Figure 6.1 – THE TRIPLE–ENTRY JOURNAL (examples)



At the start, for a very brief moment, I felt slightly removed, an attentive onlooker, waiting impatiently to pounce on the telling words that might emerge at any moment from one of us, the words that would reveal and connect what and who. But then, in an instant, I was right in the moment, part of an "us" that naturally solicited my full participation. We started with introductions, and while I suppose I had expected professional biographies of sorts, it struck me that everyone also began by trying to define their relationship to me, in various ways attempting to explain (to me? to each other? to themselves?) why they felt they might be part of our group. In general, we were not a collection of friends, though some of us knew each other under various headings, but there was apparent good will to form a community through real connections. I was surprised at how rapidly we seemed to move past formalities, and this was, at least in part, thanks to Frank McCourt. He was one of us. He seemed to be sitting at our table, familiar to us all, partaking in the conversation and leading us to ourselves.

In planning, I had thought that we might use the prompts provided and the third column of our triple entry journals. But within minutes, our conversation flowed freely between our memories and McCourt's, our thoughts and his, our inner explorations and his, without need for outside incitement. And because he was so genuine with us, amusing some and annoying others, we seemed quite quickly to ease into a camaraderie that allowed even for teasing and the sharing of confidences, as in the excerpt below:

> Eleonore[5] *: the difficult ones, the really challenging kids, are really the ones that give you the most and the ones that you kind of have to hang in there for. That's the real teaching.*

[5] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity of all participants except myself. Participants agreed to this within the consent form.

Johanne *: You just don't call your own kids those names, right? (laughing)*

Jessica *: I remember being in the photocopy room, in the school, just after I came back from maternity leave, having had my son, N., and teachers were talking to each other saying "Never name your child N." and I was like, " Oops !It's too late!" (general laughter)*

Judith *: You didn't know you were supposed to stay in the photocopy room until your child was named, just in case ? (laughter)*

As a final task in this first session, provoked (for some) or inspired (for others) by the conversation around McCourt's stories, we (the participants) began writing about own memories and stories. I saw us all scribble away, in silence interrupted by whispered comments and muted laughs, and I wondered how it was that we were all so comfortable, so quickly. We then briefly regrouped to touch upon the emergent writing before ending the session. We agreed to keep writing in our Memory Journal on our own, with continued reflection before the following session that would take place nine days later.

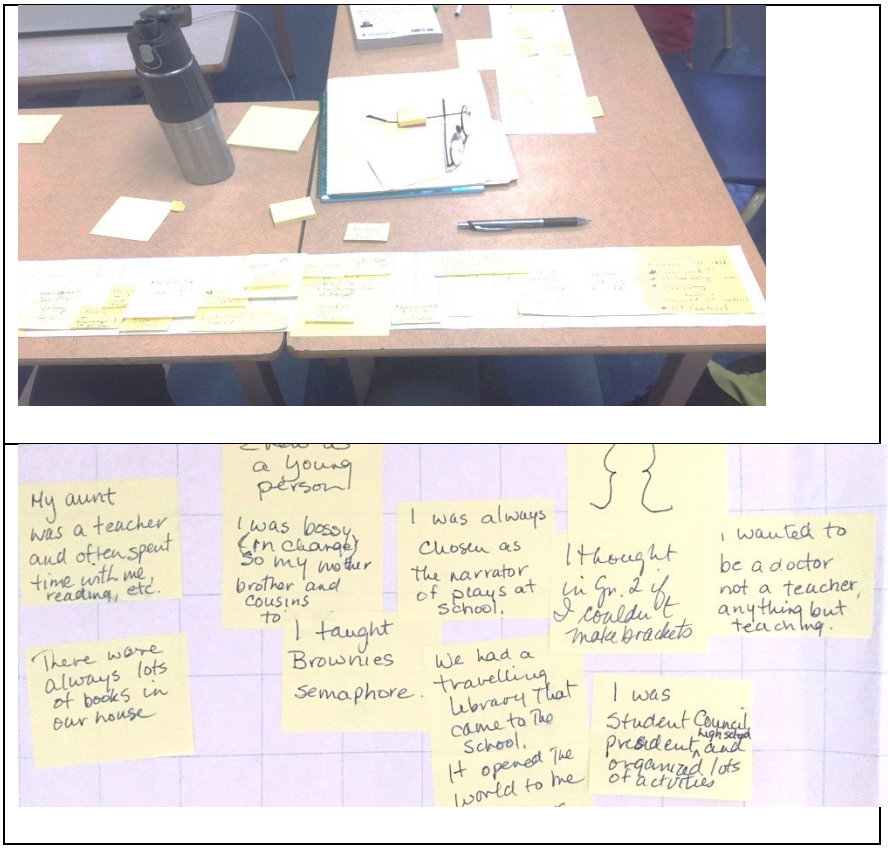
Meeting Again

Our second collective meeting started as intended.

Using post–its on long strips of paper, we attempted to build our timelines, anywhere from birth onward (at least until our teaching days) honing in on the events, personal and professional, that have led to who we are (see Figure 6.2). While this work was intended to be done individually, productive silence was interspersed with brief comments, questions and, mostly, whispered

disclosing of anecdotes retrieved, inevitably interrupted by someone with a falsely indignant tone telling the perpetrator to stop talking, and this mostly when shared laughter was involved. I was not recording at that point; I was waiting for the group discussion in order to begin doing so.

Figure 6.2 – THE TIMELINE



We then we moved on to pair conversation, where partners shared their timelines with each other, with the possibility of adding to them or moving post–its around where preferable or necessary. I immediately saw a regrettable oversight in my plan; I had not thought of recording these conversations. In the moment, with just one computer and one ipad, and while participating

myself, it was not possible to record effectively the several separate conversations occurring simulateously within one room.

Again as planned, the next step was to take twenty minutes to write independently, in our Memory Journal, freshly immersed in our trajectories, to put to paper any new thoughts or further reflection and generally immerse ourselves in our stories before stepping into the collective discussion. The process ran smoothly until that point.

Was it that I then started recording, inadvertently drawing attention to the more formal nature of our meeting? Was it that we emerged from our personal writing, some of us not quite finished remembering a moment but pulled back to the present by others who already were? Was it that, having been engrossed in our individual writing, we did not know how to insert ourselves back into the group? The fact is that the moment we were supposed to start our collective conversation, silence permeated the room. And it seemed uncomfortable to me. Flustered but not wanting to fill up space pointlessly, I waited to see where the generally very collegial atmosphere would give rise again to the easy flow of our previous discussions. Palmer (2004) asks: "How to write about silence, which is wordless?" (p. 152). He later writes "Silence makes us vulnerable because when we stop making noise, we lose control" (p. 152). I felt that vulnerability, until one of the participants, Judith, jumped in and thankfully proceeded to tell her story as she saw it emerging from her writing and her timeline:

> *I don't mind starting. I can start because it's probably a very practical story where I didn't at all wanted to be a teacher until (laughs), until my mother kind of looked at what I had in African Anthropology and deviance sociology, and said, "You have to get a job."*

The conversation then flowed again, but I admit I remained perhaps slightly guarded, worried about the silence. In another gap between plan and realization, there was also a sense that despite my original intention with these timelines, to focus on trajectories, transitions and turning points, our most explicit efforts were not so successful in clearly identifying them. We used the words, in particular the expression turning point, but did not really seem to be able to point specifically to the stories that, in hindsight, were revelatory of our later attachment to teaching. The more I tried to dig, the more I felt I was artificially prodding, and still no evident results. That silence also preoccupied me, but I decided to let go, and see what would emerge on its own. I realize I was not considering that, as Palmer (2004) reminds us, "we can be silent 'with' people, as in the kind of silence that surrounds reflection, contemplation" (p. 155). Maybe I did not trust, at the time, that this silence could be one of productive questionings and thoughts.

We reconfirmed that, as indicated from the start, we would pursue our writing and reflection on our own before the third and final collective meeting. I left with the impression that this session had not been as fruitful as the first, not knowing exactly why I felt that way.

However, in organizing the one–on–one interviews that now had to take place with each member of our team, I was brought to reconsider this impression. For one, several participants commented explicitly on the valuable conversation they felt had taken place. One participant even mentioned in an email that she thought the discussion in the second meeting was more genuine and revealing than the first, and that she therefore very much looked forward to what the third session would bring. Moreover, one participant wrote to me to apologize for his more distant mood, explaining that personal circumstances had left him very out of sorts that day. He said he had thought of

removing himself from the session but had changed his mind remembering how much insight he had gained from the first meeting. At the end of his email, he underlined how pleased he was to have attended, despite his earlier misgivings.

Beginnings of Analysis – from Incubation to Illumination

While I had planned to attend to recordings and transcriptions after every collective session, the reality was there was not much time to delve properly into these between the first and second group meetings. Now, the first two collective sessions were done. Knowing that I would soon be meeting with each member of our team for an interview, wanting to prepare myself for this, I gave my full attention to the recordings and transcriptions from the first two group sessions.

For a while, listening to the recordings and reading the transcripts occurred as they might, sometimes each on their own, sometimes combined, but with no thoughtful purpose for choosing one over the other. And then, one evening as I sat in my bed, transcription in hand, trying to make sense of a passage that seemed to offer some insights that were just slightly out of reach, I realized that I was missing something. I was missing the telling signs of the voice, the emotion, the slight pause or hesitation or, to the contrary, that certainty, the solid affirmation, those pieces undetected on paper that would bring needed dimension to the words. Leaving the transcriptions and my bed, I hurried back to the computer on my desk to listen to the recording of the same passage. But while I listened, and now heard the nuances, the interruptions, the acceleration and decelerations that had been absent from the pages I had been reading, I was now instead missing the opportunity to slow everything down, to look intently at the words and really notice each one in interaction with the others. That night made it clear, uncovering stories and making sense of

them demanded the richness of the various means combined: words spoken, words written, words read, words heard.

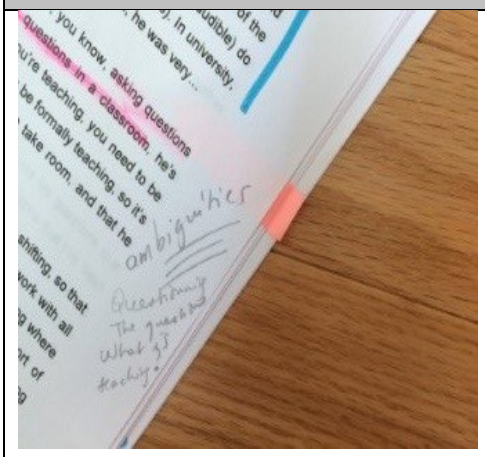
In dedicating myself to the recordings and transcripts, my initial impetus was perhaps more to enhance my sense of the conversations, because when they were actually taking place I was very involved in them as a participant. But as I listened to the recordings and read the transcripts, taking notes, I quickly found myself waiting for the data to speak to me, for repeated words or expressions, ideas, topics to announce themselves. Of the word 'analysis', the online *Merriam–Webster Dictionary* indicates the following as a first definition: "detailed examination of anything complex in order to understand its nature or to determine its essential features: a thorough study doing a careful analysis of the problem" ("Analysis," 2017). I knew that I had begun my analysis. While the other participants simmered in the incubation phase, I felt myself drawn into the illumination phase, which Moustakas (1990) defines as "a breakthrough into conscious awareness of qualities and a clustering of qualities into themes inherent in the question" (p. 29).

I systematically jotted down, on the transcripts and in a research log, one or a few words to summarize or reflect any new idea or moment expressed (See Figure 6.3). These were the beginnings of the coarse–grained phase of analysis (Butler-Kisber, 2010), and I felt I was gaining a perspective that would help me maximize the potential of the interviews.

From there, my attention to the data moved into a more systematic mode. As planned, I was inspired by the constant comparative method as a complement to the heuristic inquiry process. Maykut and Morehouse (1994) write: "As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is

compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped (categorized and coded) with similar units of meaning" (p. 123).

Figure 6.3 – RESEARCH NOTES (excerpts)

Within the transcripts	Within a research log
	• Perseverance (doggedness?) *Good quote: He stuck to it. That's one of the traits of being a teacher for sure (Mi)* • Naiveté (Not knowing exactly what you are getting yourself into? Not being fully aware of consequences? Of what some things might entail? Yet going forward.) *Good quote: Il [McCourt] arrive seul, personne à qui parler, pas d'ami qui enseigne avec lui, il faut qu'il s'invente. Moi aussi, j'essayais de voir comment je pouvais m'inventer. En attendant de trouver, je faisais de mon mieux.(Jo)* • Storytellers and storytelling (wanting to have stories, to hear stories, to share stories) *Good quote: "[...] the stories were him being himself in the absence of knowing[...] (Je)* *Good quote: "Like me, he [McCourt] didn't have a grip for a long time on what was happening, he was just playing it by ear until he started to connect through his stories" (Ju)* • Teaching (how is it viewed, what are the impressions of teaching?) *Good quote: "On a toujours l'impression que si on ne corrige pas toutes les fins de semaine, tu sais, si on ne travaille pas fort en corrigeant, corrigeant corrigeant, si on a trop de plaisir, on est moins valable. [...]" (Jo)* AMBIGUITIES? See page 45 of transcript (16-05) –identity as well? Something to get back to.

I began unitizing, that is, trying to group together excerpts relating to the same content. Under these preliminary themes, I copied and pasted direct passages from the recordings, identifying the speaker (for example, Je), and indicating the date of the meeting for future management of information (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4 – INITIAL SORTING (excerpt)

Honesty -

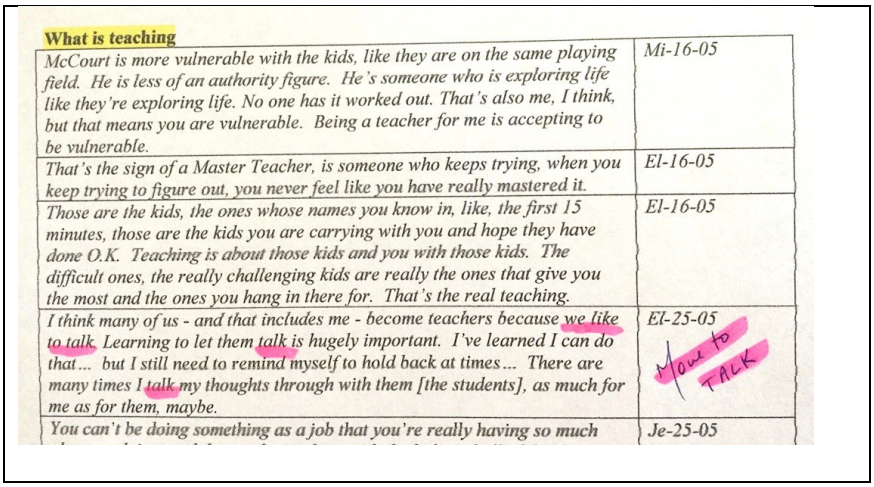
Ce qui m'a frappée, moi, c'est que c'était un livre très honnête.	*Ni-16-05*
Pour moi aussi, c'est l'honnêteté, le fait qu'on comprenne que quand il arrive à l'enseignement, il arrive avec tout l'être qu'il est.	*Jo-16-05*
There is something really exciting about reading recipes and it makes you want to order more cookbooks. We don't know exactly, like, what the next piece was, but it is so real. Using language genuinely, you know ?	*El-16-05*
Mais je pense que c'est quand il [McCourt] parle des vraies choses qu'il se sent le mieux. Quand il raconte ses vraies histoires, quand il parle de recettes, quand c'est vrai et concret, authentique, ça marche avec les élèves mais ça le rassure aussi, cette honnêteté, et je le comprends.	*Ni-16-05*
He (McCourt) doesn't have a romantic image of teaching, and it seems he doesn't have an image of most things. He wanders into romance and marriage and it doesn't work; he wanders into his Ph.D. without a lot of intention. And so, what works is when he is honest about things that happen and he realizes, wait, my stories are resonating with the students and the students are much more engaged with it. So, I guess that becomes his way of living, telling stories…so yeah, I guess the honesty was what made me want to talk about it.	*Mi-16-05*
You have to be authentic too. You need to be truthful in what you say and what you do. Kids need to know you're in this together	*El-25-05*

Maykut and Morehouse (1994) state that, "if there are no similar units of meaning, a new category is formed. In this process, there is room for continuous refinement; initial categories are changed, merged or omitted; new categories are generated; and new relationships can be discovered" (p. 123). Thus, for each separate idea or moment expressed, there were two possible courses of action: it would fit under one of the pre–established headings, or it was placed under a new heading.

There were several instances where later excerpts from the transcriptions pushed me to rename an original heading. For instance, what I originally identified as '*Feeling like an impostor'*, I then labeled '*Self–doubt,* while '*Storytelling'* was changed to '*Stories'* and *'Honesty'* to '*Truth'* to better represent the excerpts that were coming together there. In a moment of inspiration, the heading *'Turning Points'*, to which I had held on steadfastly from the start, was renamed '*Trajectories'* to encompass any connection to trajectories as I uncovered revelatory moments expressed by us that had not necessarily been divulged or identified as transitions (having impacted our trajectories), or turning points (having changed our trajectories). It is noteworthy that through this new heading, my eyes were also opened to important stories and comments I had not really acknowledged before.

Excerpts were shifted from one heading to another that suited them better, especially as other themes emerged (see Figure 6.5). The excerpts that originally were placed under the somewhat generic *'About Frank McCourt'* were slowly moved to other, more relevant headings. And some headings were subdivided, their scope too large to enable the words to speak to their full extent. For instance, the heading that was originally called '*Teaching'* was slowly subdivided into several headings: *'Defining teaching';* '*Bad experiences*'; '*Value of teaching'; 'Connectedness'*.

Figure 6.5 – MOVING EXCERPTS



What is teaching	
McCourt is more vulnerable with the kids, like they are on the same playing field. He is less of an authority figure. He's someone who is exploring life like they're exploring life. No one has it worked out. That's also me, I think, but that means you are vulnerable. Being a teacher for me is accepting to be vulnerable.	*Mi-16-05*
That's the sign of a Master Teacher, is someone who keeps trying, when you keep trying to figure out, you never feel like you have really mastered it.	*El-16-05*
Those are the kids, the ones whose names you know in, like, the first 15 minutes, those are the kids you are carrying with you and hope they have done O.K. Teaching is about those kids and you with those kids. The difficult ones, the really challenging kids are really the ones that give you the most and the ones you hang in there for. That's the real teaching.	*El-16-05*
I think many of us - and that includes me - become teachers because we like to talk. Learning to let them talk is hugely important. I've learned I can do that... but I still need to remind myself to hold back at times... There are many times I talk my thoughts through with them [the students], as much for me as for them, maybe.	*El-25-05* MOVE TO TALK
You can't be doing something as a job that you're really having so much	*Je-25-05*

At the end of this first step, I read through my newly created document to assess the specificity of the headings, and the accuracy of the match between headings and the excerpts. At this point, I had 17 themes or headings for which I had established rules of inclusion (see Table 6.2), that is constraints or guidelines for the selection of data to be included under a particular heading (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Of these, twelve were initially broached during the first collective session.

While there were very few outliers (elements of the transcriptions that simply would not fit any of the headings) these preoccupied me greatly. I originally labeled them "asides", because this is all that seemed to describe or connect them. They were side stories or humorous moments where the main conversation had taken a tangent or been diverted before being quickly brought back, usually by the speaker him or herself, sometimes by another participant (see Figure 6.6).

Table 6.2 – INITIAL HEADINGS OR THEMES AND RULES OF INCLUSION

HEADING/THEME	RULE OF INCLUSION
Truth	Honesty, authenticity, sincerity, genuineness are put forth as meaningful qualities.
Self-doubt	Feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-assuredness, lack of certitude are expressed in relation to teaching.
Stories	Attention is drawn to personal stories.
Talk	Focus is placed on the role or value of talk.
Defining Teaching	Teaching or aspects of teaching are defined.
Bad Experiences	Negative experiences of school, associated to either teaching or learning are described.
Value of Teaching	Expressions of how society or individuals view teaching; past or present impressions of teaching.
Learning	Instances of learning are put forward, their value highlighted.
Words	Explicit attention is drawn to words and their importance.
Reading	Experiences connected to reading are shared; reading is explicitly mentioned.
Writing	Expressions of the value of writing.
Creativity	Connections between creativity and teaching are explicitly expressed.
Connectedness	Connections to students are expressed; developing relationships in teaching are valued.
About Literacy	Explicit mention is made of the word literacy in connection to self.
Trajectories	Moments of realization, of revelation are expressed in connection to life trajectories (including allusions or references to transitions or turning points).
Vocation/Profession	The words vocation or profession are explicitly mentioned in connection to teaching, or are implicitly evoked.
Asides	Side stories where the main conversation takes a tangent or has been diverted for a brief moment.

Figure 6.6 – ASIDES (sample[6])

Asides-

• *What's that - he says, he's in a school and he tries to learn, there's something that a professor says he needs to do…* • *Oh yeah, they're diagramming or something* • *What is that, diagramming ?* • *Well, if you don't know, you obviously can't be a teacher !*	*Je-16-05* *El-16-05* *Je-16-05* *Mi-16-05*
• *Est-ce que tu essaies de dire quelque chose ?[Are you trying to say something ?]* • *Oui, j'essaie [Yes, I'm trying]* • *Ben faut faire plus d'efforts ! [Well, you'll have to make more effort !] (laughing)* • *I think he's trying but he can't get a word in edgewise ! (everyone laughs)*	*Jo-16-05* *Si-16-05* *Jo-16-05* *Mi-16-05*

When I noticed that I was spending a disproportionate amount of time trying to deal with these "asides", I finally did set them aside, planning to return to them at a later moment.

[6] My English translation of excerpts is provided in a separate font, within square brackets, immediately following or underneath the original French version, wherever applicable.

The Interviews

At the end of our second group meeting, I had proposed to my co–participants that, in preparation for our interview, they might choose a prompt or two that engaged them, perhaps one upon which we had not yet elaborated, to serve as point of entry into our one–on–one discussion. On my end, I had originally planned to focus on what I had noticed as emerging from my burgeoning analysis of our collective sessions.

However, in all of the actual interviews, it seemed that the stories took the lead without prompting, and that they gained momentum as we spoke. Through statements such as the one made by Miles: "*So you know the question 'How did you come to teaching?' I guess it's, well– what it's done is make me think about how I came to teaching but then also how do people come to teaching?"* or another, by Eleonore: *"The one thing I haven't really discussed anything about, I think, is the role writing has had in my life,"* I understood that the participants had been reflecting on the prompts, on our discussions and on the larger questions. In the moment, I cannot say I worked at creating dialogue. While again, all interviews were audio–recorded, each felt like a conversation of reminiscences with a friend. My fear of feeling at best like an interviewer on a talk show was entirely unfounded. I was as much a part of the conversation as any of the other participants, as surprised by the revelations and insights of their participation as of my own. In fact, after every interview, I looked forward to listening to the recordings to view the broader picture and get the full sense of what had transpired.

After each one–on–one conversation, I proceeded much in the same manner as with the collective sessions. Meticulously, I listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts. I sifted through the content, this time with my headings document (from the first two collective discussions) on

hand. Again, each excerpt was carefully considered, to see whether it should be placed under an existing heading or whether a new one should be created.

What soon became clear was that the interviews followed the same lines as the group conversations in terms of types of content, but they developed with much more depth and detail. Was this as a result of being "guided" by the initial group discussions? Regardless, they were indeed an indispensable part of the plan. Despite the informal nature of the interviews (these one–on–one dialogues that did not involve leading or preconception), the overlap in content type from one participant to the next was impressive. And I was astounded to note that almost all the information from the individual interviews seemed to fit under the headings established from the first two collective discussions. The only new category created at that time was *'About language'*, for which the rule of inclusion was *'Attention is drawn to language as a whole and to specific languages (French, English)'*.

Again, I noted a few unsorted elements, similar to the ones found earlier, going into my 'Asides' category for later examination. In the interviews, however, these were less frequent and more discreet, giving the sense that we were more focused, our attention more sustained, during the interviews than we had been in the group discussions.

Meeting Once More – from Illumination to Explication

In the one–month interval between the second and third collective sessions, I had had the opportunity of spending time with all participants in the one–on–one interviews, deepening my awareness of their stories and allowing them greater insight into mine. However, they had not

had the same privilege with each other. Moreover, I had listened numerous times to the recordings of all sessions, transcribing and keeping notes both on the transcripts and in my research log. I therefore looked forward to the final collective session, curious to see what would transpire with the group members reassembled.

For this third and last collective meeting, I was also ready to validate the various headings or themes and their legitimacy with the other participants, as per my plan. Throughout the ebb and flow of the conversation, I asked pointed questions, where most natural, to allow the others to give feedback on what I had established as headings and themes, explaining that this was what seemed to arise from our talks and asking for their thoughts or reflection. Once again the conversation seemed to spontaneously take on a life of its own and it was sometimes difficult to work specific questions into the discussions without disrupting the natural flow. I was therefore fearful that I had not been entirely successful in my validation process. But when I more closely examined the recording of this last session, I realized that we had, despite the twists and turns of the conversation, touched upon all the important pieces. In fact, through this validation I was given the perspective required to further fine–tune my headings. Before concluding this session, participants were given one last opportunity to write in their Memory Journals before I, as intitiating researcher, collected them. I believe it is worthy of note that when our meeting ended, most participants lingered to pursue conversations, as though feeling reluctant to bring the discussion, this study, to a close.

I now turned to the last recording as well as to the Memory Journals, and I followed my original steps for analysis. In my planning, I had not considered in depth the particular analysis of the Memory Journals, and I found these required greater attention because the writing was often

more dispersed, less structured than any of the conversations had been. There were a lot of pieces to consider, whether they were notes jotted in a margin, or a story begun on one page and continued only several pages later as a result of the conversations that had occurred in between.

By the end, having sorted through all contents, there was a total of 18 themes (see Table 6.3). I had again been bothered by the presence of the outliers, temporarily placed under the *'Asides'* heading, as I felt they hindered my sorting, a thorn in my side. And then in a clarifying moment, I realized that they were a confirmation of something vital to the success of my study. They were a sign of relationship:

Eleonore *: I don't teach anymore.*

Judith *: Sure you do, you teach teachers.*

Miles *: I have you on video teaching teachers.*

Eleonore *: What ? Are you stalking me ? (everyone laughs)*

They confirmed that we were comfortable enough with each other, that we had indeed formed an authentic entity rather than an artificial gathering; we had developed a bond of sorts. The heading *'Asides'* was therefore changed to *'Evidence of relationship'*. This reminded me of Palmer's (2004) circle of trust, a gathering which he says "holds us in a space where we can make our own discernments, in our own way and time, in the encouraging and challenging presence of other people" (p. 27) and in which success is reliant on a climate of non–judgment and the utter freedom of self–revelation. While we were not operating within a circle of trust as such, uncovering the who called for similar conditions. The excerpts found under *'Evidence of relationship'* revealed that we had been moving in the right direction.

Table 6.3 – FINAL HEADINGS OR THEMES AND RULES OF INCLUSION

HEADING/THEME	RULE OF INCLUSION
Truth	Honesty, authenticity, sincerity, genuineness are put forth as meaningful qualities.
Self-doubt	Feelings of inadequacy, lack of self-confidence, lack of self-assuredness, lack of certitude are expressed in relation to teaching.
Stories	Attention is drawn to personal stories.
Talk	Focus is placed on the role or value of talk.
Defining Teaching	Teaching or aspects of teaching are defined.
Bad Experiences	Negative experiences of school, associated to either teaching or learning, are described.
Value of Teaching	Expressions of how society or individuals view teaching; past or present impressions of teaching.
Learning	Instances of learning are put forward, their value highlighted.
Words	Explicit attention is drawn to words and their importance.
Reading	Experiences connected to reading are shared; reading is explicitly mentioned.
Writing	Expressions of the value of writing.
Creativity	Connections between creativity and teaching are explicitly expressed.
Connectedness	Connections to students are expressed; developing relationships in teaching are valued.
Language	A love of language or connection to language is expressed; attention is drawn to specific languages (French, English).
About Literacy	Explicit mention is made of the word literacy in connection to self.
Trajectories	Moments of realization, of revelation are expressed in connection to life trajectories (including allusions or references to transitions or turning points).
Vocation/Profession	The words vocation or profession are explicitly mentioned in connection to teaching, or are implicitly evoked.
Evidence of Relationship	Brief side stories where the main conversation takes a tangent or has been diverted, suggesting relationship between participants.

With this organization of the data, three elements of information were now identifiable. The first was the number of instances where a type of content was brought up. For example, I could see that *'Defining teaching'* was the heading under which the most excerpts had found their place. The second was the different moments in which a same type of content was brought up. For example, *'Self–doubt* had come up in the first and third collective sessions, as well as most individual interviews and Memory Journals, but not in the second group meeting. *'Defining teaching'*, on the other hand, had come up at every occasion. The third element of information was the number of different people addressing a given content. For instance, 7 of the 8 participants addressed *'Bad experiences'* in one form or another, and all participants had contributed to the *'Reading'* theme. These added interesting perspective in the on–going analysis which was moving from coarse–grained to fine–grained (Butler-Kisber, 2010) .

I had planned to remain in contact with members of the research team as needed, for additional questions or clarification. Not only did I do so, but several participants, through their self–admitted curiosity and need for answers, reached out to me, at various times, to question and discuss what was emerging from further analysis.

Preparing to Hear the Data

My puzzle pieces, initially strewn on the floor, were now organized with a sense of the larger picture: corner pieces to one side, blue sky pieces to the other, green grass pieces grouped together, and so on. But what is a puzzle if not assembled? I was in it for the whole. I knew it was time to focus once more on my investigation questions, to consider the conceptual categorization of themes and headings. It was time to bring to light any possible pathways to the connection between the what and the who. In the space where illumination meets explication, where the uncovering of themes and qualities gives way to deeper sense–making, I understood that it was time to review all that had now been gathered, in order to better move ahead. Chapter 7 returns to the story of the investigation, this time to further delve into the analysis, to listen attentively to the data now sorted, giving the conversations, writing, memories and stories in first-hand accounts, the space and attention to begin disclosing their treasures.

Chapter 7 – Finding the Who

Language most shews a man: Speak, that I may see thee. (Ben Jonson)

Once upon a time, there was a group of people whose mission was to answer two questions: How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of a definition of self ? What commits us to such teaching?

Miles, Eleonore, Nidia, Johanne, Lynn, Judith and Silvestre[7] were invited to join me in this endeavour, chosen through criterion sampling (Palys, 2008). Was it the same as successfully organizing a dinner party where all the guests, mostly strangers to each other, are so well selected that the atmosphere is one of old friends coming together, where pretences are left behind and vivaciousness and camaraderie are de rigueur, where even confidences can be shared at the table? The fit had to be exact.

As I later understood, a special invitation to an outside guest was most fortuitous in this story of stories. Although I did not identify it as such in the moment, his presence, in particular at our first collective session was critical in exploring the questions under investigation.

Our guest participant was Frank McCourt. Through his novel, *Teacher Man* (2005), he called out to me, stating that his own stories might be helpful in unveiling mine and those of others. He argued that he would be the social glue that would help connect us all through the awkward

[7] Pseudonyms are used to ensure the anonymity of participants (exluding myself).

beginnings of conversation among strangers. He explained that he could lend the words that we might be more tentative about expressing to one another at the onset. He said his introspection would ease us into ourselves. I am not sure I heard him or believed him fully in this at first, but he was right. *Teacher Man* (McCourt, 2005) was our third thing (Palmer, 2004). In addressing third things, Palmer (2004) writes, "Mediated by a good metaphor, the soul is more likely than usual to have something to say"(p. 93). And ours had much to say.

Of the 18 themes or headings that emerged from our group discussions, our interviews and our Memory Journals, 12 were first broached in that initial conversation and then reiterated along the investigation, in different ways, under various guises, using diverse words. These surfaced from our interactions with Frank McCourt: his words, his thoughts, his stories, his presence. I look back and wonder at how I ever thought we could have conversations about literacy, teaching and the who without involving a book, this book. When Palmer (2004) writes about a poem as a third thing, he states: "For a while, it may sound as if we are talking about the poet's journey toward selfhood. But we soon come to understand that whatever we say about the poem, we are saying about ourselves" (p. 91). And so it was that, in reading, writing and conversation, we fluidly moved from talking about McCourt, to talking with him and then about ourselves and with each other.

Reading and re–reading the transcripts, listening over and over again to the voices and exchanges, I pondered how I would do justice to us all in my reporting. This was not simply about describing each of the headings or themes as it appeared in my notes. In the space where illumination, the uncovering, meets explication, the sense–making, in that space where awakening turns into

understanding, it was about finding the stories and, in the end, seeking a connection between the who and the what to answer the questions under investigation.

Over and over, I studied the hundreds of excerpts sorted under the 18 themes or headings, trying to see how best to present what they recounted. I looked back at my methodology and considered what I had written about first–hand experiences being told through first–hand accounts. I did not know then what that would look like, concretely, in the final telling. How would I let everyone tell their own stories within one, larger story? Maykut and Morehouse (1994) write: "You want people's thoughts, feelings and experiences to be conveyed in their own words whenever possible" (p. 146). As far as possible, I decided to allow the excerpts[8] to speak for themselves, first–hand accounts woven together[9].

I felt I should begin with the who. I thought again of Arendt's (1998) observation that "the moment we want to say who somebody is, our very vocabulary leads us astray into saying what he is" (p. 181). Could this statement be reversed? What if we purposely observed what somebody said about themselves? Might we encounter disclosures of the who, seeping through the vocabulary?

Trying to see the bigger picture, looking intently at the themes or headings, I saw that they could be organized in two conceptual categories (see Table 7.1): 'About us' (themes exposing stories and reflection on ourselves, or characteristics of ourselves, evoking the who) and 'About teaching'

[8] My English translation of excerpts is provided in a separate font, within square brackets, beneath or immediately following the original French version, wherever applicable.

[9] Excerpts included in this chapter were selected with attention to avoiding redudancy and remaining concise, while fairly representing the content and ideas put forth, and giving every participant a voice.

(themes exposing stories or reflection on teaching, or connections to teaching, addressing the what). I began looking at themes that fell under 'About us', including Truth, Self–doubt, Learning, Talk, Language, Words, Writing, Reading, Stories, and Bad Experiences. I hoped that the essence of the who would surface somewhere amidst those conversations. Later, I would address the what of teaching (under the conceptual category 'About teaching'), as well as the connection between literacy teaching and the who (see Chapter 8).

Table 7.1 – CONCEPTUAL CATEGORIZATION OF THEMES AND HEADINGS[10]

ABOUT US Evoking the who	ABOUT TEACHING Addressing the what
Truth	Defining Teaching
Self-doubt	Value of Teaching
Learning	Connectedness
Talk	Vocation or Profession
Language	Why Literacy
Words	Trajectories
Writing	
Reading	
Stories	
Bad Experiences	
Creativity	
Evidence of Relationships	

Truth

Palmer (2004) writes "The soul wants truth, not trivia" (p. 126). Was this why our group so quickly navigated towards truth? It presented itself through words such as honesty and authenticity, words about which I had long–standing misgivings. They had shown up in my writing even at the very preliminary stages, and I thought they might be among those words that sometimes get thrown around as trendy accessories. So I observed them cautiously, attentively.

[10] The rules of inclusion for the themes and headings under the global categorization remain the same as they were when individually listed (see Chapter 6, Table 6.3).

Within minutes of our first group session, just after the introductions, Nidia made the following statement about *Teacher Man (*McCourt*, 2005)*: *"Ce qui m'a frappée, moi, c'est que c'était un livre très honnête." [What struck me is that is was a very honest book.]* There was that word: honest. She later underlined:

> *Mais je pense que c'est quand il [McCourt] parle des vraies choses qu'il se sent le mieux. Quand il raconte ses vraies histoires, quand il parle de recettes, quand c'est vrai et concret, authentique, ça marche avec les élèves mais ça le rassure aussi, cette honnêteté, et je le comprends.*
>
> *[But I think that it is when he [McCourt] speaks of real things that he feels the best. When he tells his true stories, when he talks about recipes, when it's real and concrete, authentic, it works with the students but it reassures him too, this honesty, and I understand.]*

True. Real. Authentic.

Johanne added (still about McCourt): *"Pour moi aussi c'est l'honnêteté, le fait qu'on comprenne que quand il arrive à l'enseignement, il arrive avec tout l'être qu'il est, sincèrement, c'est ça pour moi aussi" [For me it is also honesty, the fact that we understand that when he gets to teaching, he gets there with the whole being that he is, sincerely, it's that for me as well]*, bringing who and sincerity into the conversation.

Silvestre said: "*Il y a une vulnérabilité chez cet homme [McCourt] que j'apprécie beaucoup, une sincérité qui m'interpellait." [There is a vulnerability in this man (McCourt) that I greatly appreciate, a sincerity that spoke to me.]*

Later, Miles, who explained that he had not loved *Teacher Man* (McCourt, 2005) but that it still provoked him to want to talk about it, referred to honesty as the saving grace:

> *He (McCourt) doesn't have a romantic image of teaching, and it seems he doesn't have an image of most things. He wanders into romance and marriage and it doesn't work; he wanders into his Ph.D. without a lot of intention. And so, what works is when he is honest about things that happen. I guess the honesty was what made me want to talk about it.*

In highlighting authenticity, lauding sincerity, applauding honesty, we seemed compelled by truth, attracted to McCourt's sense of it, seeking out and valuing the possibility of who–to–who connections that derive from truth.

Self–doubt

McCourt (2005) begins his book (first page, first lines of the prologue) with the following statement:

> If I knew anything about Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis I'd be able to trace all my troubles to my miserable childhood in Ireland. That miserable childhood deprived me of my self–esteem, triggered spasms of self pity, paralyzed my emotions, made me cranky, envious and disrespectful of authority, retarded my development, crippled my doings with the opposite sex, kept me from rising in the world and made me unfit, almost, for human society. How I became a teacher at all and remained one is a miracle and I have to give myself full marks for surviving all those years in the classrooms of New York. (p. 1)

Throughout his stories, McCourt remained very critical of himself. We discussed Frank McCourt's self–deprecation and seemed inclined to our own self–critique.

Echoing the words uttered by several, Johanne said: *"Tout ce qu'il fait, pour lui, c'est une erreur, premièrement, puis quand ça marche, c'est une surprise, pas une victoire. Il n'a pas confiance en lui, jamais."* *[Everything he does, in his mind, it's an error, first, and then when it works, it's a surprise, an accident, not a victory. He does not have confidence in himself, ever.]*

Silvestre said: "*Il n'est jamais convaincu qu'il est un bon prof ou, surtout, qu'il peut l'être; il est humble, très humble, trop humble*." *[He is never convinced that he is a good teacher or that he can be; he is humble, very humble, too humble.]*

Eleonore even questioned the honesty of the self–deprecation: *"I didn't believe him anymore… And I have to say as I went on, I got a little bit tired of him being too self–deprecating*."

Yet, as I looked back at the transcripts and the Memory Journals, it struck me that, at the start, we all had struggles with our own self–deprecation or lack of confidence, our own feelings of being an impostor in teaching. I know that I did.

In my Memory Journal I wrote about this:

Je me souviens d'être en train de me dire, dans la classe avec les élèves devant moi : Je ne sais absolument rien, et je ne sais pas comment je vais faire semblant de savoir quelque chose jusqu'à la fin de l'année.

[I remember telling myself, in the classroom with the students in front of me : I know absolutely nothing and I don't know how I will pretend to know something until the end of the year.]

To the others, I said :

You're supposed to know what you're doing, you've got your degree behind you, you're supposed to know what you are doing, you've got this responsibility of all these kids, whatever age you know, in your classroom, and you wonder "How will I fake it well enough that they'll come out with something almost real, anyways?"

Early on, Eleonore expressed similar feelings :

I was teaching grade 3 and I was terrified about the grade 3 students coming in, you know, because I had no idea how I was going to keep them busy for a whole day and I was really nervous and had hardly been able to sleep but then I wanted to set it off on the right tone. I wanted everything to be light and just right. I didn't know what I was doing.

Judith recalled:

I mean, I remember when I went for that interview. They said to me, I was supposed to have been a history and geography teacher, and they said, "We

don't have any position in history or geography, but would you teach special education?" And I said, "Sure, what's that?" maybe sounding confident but I had no idea. And that's how we started. Ignorance was what it was, and it was very– I mean, I couldn't even get students to sit in the chairs, you know, like, it was impossible.

Nidia shared a memory in the same vein:

Moi, je me souviens quand j'ai enseigné la première fois, j'ai été engagée de France pour venir enseigner ici, je n'avais aucune idée, je n'avais aucune formation, ni fait aucun stage, ni rien. J'avais le cahier de préparation d'une enseignante qui l'avait fait l'année précédente. J'avais son cahier et c'était écrit : « 8 h 05 à 8 h 10, on fait telle chose. » Et pendant les trois premiers mois, j'ai fait exactement à la lettre tout ce qu'elle avait écrit dans son cahier de préparation. C'était écrit : « Amener les élèves aux toilettes », j'amenais les élèves aux toilettes. Ils n'avaient pas envie? Pas grave. Nous y allions quand même. Je n'avais aucune idée de ce qu'il fallait faire. Tu regardes et tu te dis : « Il faut que je les tienne encore pendant tant d'heures, il faut que je leur apprenne quelque chose et qu'ils reviennent à la maison en disant à leurs parents : Oui, on a appris quelque chose. » C'était une angoisse.

[I remember when I taught the first time, I had been hired from France to teach here, I had no idea, no training, no practicum or anything. I had the planning book of the teacher who had done it the year before. I had her book and it was written "Bring the students to the bathroom", I would bring the students to the bathroom. They did not need to go? Who cares. We were going anyway. I had no idea what was to be done.

You look and you say to yourself : "I have to keep them busy for another so many hours, I have to teach them something so that they go back home telling their parents : Yes, we learned something." It was a great fear.]

Johanne thought McCourt's solitude, his lack of community in teaching, was a contributing factor to these feelings of illegitimacy, and she sympathized with this:

Il [McCourt] arrive seul, personne à qui parler, pas d'ami qui enseigne avec lui, de communauté à laquelle appartenir; il faut qu'il s'invente. Moi aussi, j'étais seule; j'essayais de voir comment je pouvais m'inventer. En attendant de trouver quelque chose, je faisais de mon mieux.

[McCourt arrives alone, no one with whom to speak, no friend who teaches with him, no community to which he can belong; he has to invent himself. I was also alone; I tried to see how I could invent myself. While waiting to figure something out, I was doing my best.]

Miles, after being silent for a moment in an initial conversation, was candid in his self–doubt: *"I see that Frank and I are on the same page. I have never felt that I had anything more than anyone else, and always was confused about why they kept me on as a teacher."*

Learning

McCourt (2005) said: "At thirty I married Alberta Small and started courses at Brooklyn College for the Master of Arts in English Literature, a degree that would help me rise in the world, earn respect, increase my teacher salary" (p. 101). This was mentioned by Miles at our second collective session, and he seemed irked by McCourt's lack of engagement and intrinsic

motivation: *"Again, he [McCourt] isn't doing anything because of real commitment, or because he really believes in bettering himself. Again, it feels very whimsical."*

Eleonore shared an anecdote that highlighted how important learning was to her early on:

> *It had to be about learning. We had to do some sort of observation and – it was the night before – I wrote a paper about observing a crowd at a Jethro Tull rock concert at the Forum. And I wrote the whole thing up and just followed whatever and basically bull** my way through it and didn't think at all, and the teacher loved it. Gave me an A+ and asked me if she could copy and hand it out for future students as a model or whatever ! And my reaction to that was " This is crap. I am not learning anything !"*

Judith spoke of life–long learning:

> *I was always learning. And when I couldn't teach a 14–year–old how to read, I decided it was time to go back to school again, and so I went back to do my Master's in the Teaching of Reading. Probably the best thing I ever did was that program. I really liked the diagnostic part, trying to figure out why kids couldn't read and eventually figuring out how they could learn to read. I have spent every year of my career figuring something else out. Learning. I'm still doing it.*

In our one–on–one conversation, Simon said: *" J'ai toujours été curieux. Je suis curieux. C'est moi, ça." [I have always been curious. I am curious. That's me.]*

Lynn mentioned: "*Là, j'ai commencé une maîtrise. Il faut toujours que j'en sache plus.*" *[Now, I have started a Master's. I always need to know more.]*

Indeed, it appeared early on that we – all but McCourt it seemed – were particularly interested in learning and had been for all our lives. This curiosity, this love of learning we had in common, was proven. Indeed, if we had placed side by side all the diplomas and certificates accumulated over the years by the participants in our group, we might have easily covered the walls of the room in which we held our group discussions. We had not all had the same ease in learning within the school system, but our team was a collection of individuals with a hunger for learning, of life–long learners, whether our learning was formalized or not: Master's in the Teaching of Reading, Master's in Second Language Teaching, certificate in woodworking, in screen–writing, in coaching tennis, certificate in administrative leadership, diploma in translation, accomplishments in music, horticulture and photography, learning through work in a variety of fields (publishing, marketing, integration of new immigrants, etc.).

Talk

Arendt (1998) writes: "Without the accompaniment of speech, at any rate, action would not only lose its revelatory character, but, and by the same token, it would lose its subject" (p. 178). Not only did we talk, in our group discussions and in our interviews, we also talked about talk.

Johanne first stated, with a laugh: *"Je crois que vous savez tous que je n'ai aucun problème à parler. J'adore discuter, échanger, raconter. J'ai des choses à dire!"* *[I think you all know that I have no problem speaking. I love discussing, exchanging, telling. I have things to say!]* Later, in speaking

of her post–secondary studies, she said that she had dropped out of school for a while when, and because, she felt she had nothing to say:

> *Les gens partageaient des opinions, les étudiants à côté de moi partageaient leurs opinions, puis moi, je n'avais rien, rien à dire, je n'avais aucune opinion. Je sais que c'est dur à croire, mais je n'avais pas d'opinion sur rien, vraiment rien à dire. Et j'ai décroché, j'ai arrêté d'aller, j'ai lâché le cégep.*
>
> *[People were sharing opinions, the students next to me were sharing their opinions, and I had nothing, nothing to say, I had no opinion. I know it's hard to believe, but I had no opinions on anything, really nothing to say. And I dropped out, I stopped going, I dropped out of cegep.]*

Silvestre told us about the pleasure, knowledge and understanding he derived from talking with people in his travels:

> *Moi, j'ai la chance de voyager quand même beaucoup pour mon travail maintenant, et je trouve que parler, discuter avec les gens, tu sais, c'est peut–être la meilleure façon de découvrir, de comprendre. Puis ça me fait vraiment plaisir de parler avec eux.*
>
> *[I am lucky to travel quite a lot for my work now, and I find that talking, discussing with people, you know, it's maybe the best way to discover, to understand. And it really brings me pleasure to speak with them.]*

Judith shared: "*I was also chosen to be the narrator in plays, or anything that happened to be – if there was something to talk about, I loved talking, I always ended up being that person who would do the talking."*

I thought of how often it had occurred in my life that I had felt stuck in my thoughts, unable to figure out my writing or a project of some kind, until a conversation had inconspicuously removed all obstacles, completely freeing me. We spoke of how liberating talk could be. Lynn said: *Je croyais que je ne savais pas, puis en parlant avec quelqu'un, en discutant, c'est comme si je me rendais compte que, finalement, je savais. [I thought I didn't know, and then in speaking with someone, discussing, it's as though I realized that, in the end, I knew.]*

In my Memory Journal, I wrote:

> *Talk, as the spark, ignites the kindling wood of ideas and thoughts, as disordered or faint as they may be, and somehow always empowers the flame to grow, to dance, to explode, at will. From as far as I can remember, I have needed to talk through my plans, my intuitions, my emerging structures, to construct worthwhile monuments.*

I was reminded of Charles Taylor (2016), who states about language that:

> …We do indeed, observe, inform ourselves about the world of self–standing objects, and do all sorts of things with the information. But we also build ourselves landscapes of meanings, both human meanings and footings (and these are related). We make these meanings exist for us by enacting them, then expressing them, naming them, critically examining them, arguing about them, fighting (sometimes) about them… (p. 332)

Miles highlighted the revelation that occurred for him at university where he felt that finally, *"talk was encouraged and rewarded."* He added, "*Not only was I expected to speak, but there was the expectation that someone would listen, that I would be heard."*

I thought again of Arendt (1998): "In acting and speaking, men show who they are" (p. 179) .

Language

I was not explicitly aware of it while we were meeting, but looking back at all the conversations, I am amazed at the fluid bilinguality of them. Passages from McCourt's life were brought up in English to participants who had read his autobiography in French, and vice–versa, and no one ever seemed to notice. A person would transition back and forth between English and French, seamlessly, regardless of the level of comfort in one or the other. Someone would begin a thought in one language and someone else finish it in the other.

Without the recordings and transcriptions, I would not have remembered when French was spoken, or when English was chosen instead. However, there were moments when language was explicitly discussed, always with affective connotations.

Miles described his learning of French:

> *My father found out he had this French background, you know. And he has always been in love with French culture. He wanted us to be French. He was really keen on that. And then I was always terrible at French and really not getting it 'cause there was no reason for me to want to learn French. So then*

when we moved from Winnipeg to Ottawa, I mean, I got put in a school and the principal sat me down and he said "Listen, I don't know what's going on here anyway but I don't think you're going to do okay at this school. Maybe you should go someplace else." And I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Your French is terrible. I don't think you're going to succeed. I'm going to get teachers coming to see me and tell me that, you know, you're not doing well." I don't know what it was but the fact he's the first person who said I couldn't. And so I said to him, "Tu vas voir." [You will see.] *And from then on, I got high marks in everything. It was like I turned around and everything. I got high marks and I graduated with honours. In university, I actually got a minor in French literature.*

Silvestre spoke of learning both languages, changing cities and schools, but knowing that French was the language of the heart for his parents, and for himself:

Je pense que mes parents étaient amoureux de notre langue, sans jamais le dire officiellement. Je pense qu'ils avaient une grande fierté de cette langue. Ils me l'ont transmise. J'ai vécu et étudié dans les deux langues, je les utilise régulièrement dans ma vie, mais j'ai un amour du français qui est très profond, ça fait partie de moi.

[I think my parents were in love with our language, without ever saying it formally. I think they had a great pride in this language. They passed it on to me. I have lived and studied in both languages, I use them regularly in my life, but I have a love of French that is very, very deep. It's part of me.]

Judith spoke about growing up in English, surrounded by French:

> *It's strange when I think about it, because we lived in this almost closed off, very small anglophone community within a French community. I feel like French was always there but on the outside. And there is a connection to it. It's too bad actually that I wasn't really a part of the French community there until I was about 16 and I worked. I think I used French at that job, when I was 16, because I was the only English speaking person. My mother told me that I spoke French when I was 5 years old as well as I did when I was 16, because there was a girl next door. The family lived next door and we were the same age, so we used to play together all the time.*

I remembered my own story, written in my Memory Journal:

> *While I began my life as a unilingual francophone, I do not remember anything other than bilingualism. From the onset, my parents (who had come from France) made it their mission to ensure that their children would at least own Canada's two official languages; at least. They were both teachers, so for them this mission was not abstract or simply philosophical. Rather, it gave rise to concrete decisions such as choosing one school for kindergarten and grade one to immerse me in English instruction and offer me a solid foundation in English, and another as of grade two to offer full exposure to both French and English. They were adamant about our affiliation to French, our sentimental connection and roots to the "francophonie", but I was expected not only to know, but to be both languages. And I was – I am.*

Throughout the study, stories were told in a mix of the two languages. What mattered, it seemed, was that the right idea be expressed using the right words, those that would deliver the message.

Words

Among our group, there seemed to be a sensibility for words. We paid close attention to them.

Of McCourt, Judith remarked: *He didn't know the word spatula. There were a whole bunch of food words that he didn't know and I thought they would be common words but maybe not ?*

Eleonore shared an anecdote from when she was in elementary school : *"I got a book at the end of the year. It was a little chapter book and I got it and it says 'to El. for diligence'. For diligence ! I was quite pleased. I had no idea what diligence was but it sounded… regal."*

In my Memory Journal, I wrote: *"McCourt likes words. I have always liked words – what they look like, how they feel when I say them. I notice words."* And with the group, I had shared: "*He [McCourt] talks about words, highlights words, like when he uses 'nevertheless' and he remarks about this being the first time, and that is exactly me. I'll notice words, I'll remember them. I'll try words out just to see how they feel.*

In her Memory Journal, Nidia recounted:

> *À trois ans, j'aimais les mots, j'aimais répéter les mots nouveaux que j'avais entendus. Je passais des journées entières sous la table de la salle à manger et j'entendais les adultes parler. Ils m'oubliaient. Je répétais les mots que j'aimais*

et je n'en demandais le sens que le soir à mes parents. J'avais peur d'être déçue par leur signification.

[When I was three years old, I loved words, I loved repeating the new words I had heard. I spent entire days under the dining room table and I heard the adults speaking. They would forget about me. I repeated the words that I liked and I would wait until night time to ask my parents what they meant. I was afraid to be disappointed by their meaning.]

We had a whole conversation around McCourt's statement that: "Grammar is the study of the way language behaves" (McCourt, 2005, p. 80), and we were excited about the choice of the word 'behaves'. We also spent time on the word gibberish ('charabia' in French):

Silvestre : *En français, il [McCourt] parle du mot charabia. Je suis curieux, moi, en anglais, c'est quoi le mot charabia ? [In French, he speaks of the word 'charabia'. I am curious, what is the word 'charabia' in English ?]*

Johanne : *Gibberish, maybe it was gibberish?*

Silvestre : *C'est génial. Charabia, gibberish, deux mots qu'on a envie de dire, hein, deux mots bizarres mais qu'on a envie de dire. [That's great. Charabia, gibberish, two words we feel like saying, eh, two strange words but that we feel like saying.]*

Eleonore : *They sound like their definition, like language that makes no sense*

Jessica : *The kind of word you want to say because you sound like you are talking gibberish and you are actually using a precise word.*

Because some of us were reading *Teacher Man* in French and others in English, we also regularly discussed the accuracy of the translation and the adequacy of the chosen words in French to

represent the true intention of the author's original words in English. These discussions were not technical; they were quasi spiritual:

Silvestre : *Je fais un aparté mais je n'aime pas la traduction du livre. Les mots utilisés dans la version en français, des fois ça perd de la valeur.* [This is an aside but I don't like the translation of the book. The words used in the French version, sometimes it takes away value.]

Miles : *The translation was disappointing ? That's what you said before.*

Johanne *: Bien moi, je viens de lire ça [ce passage] dans les deux langues. Je voulais retrouver la même sensation mais je suis vraiment déçue, des fois c'est presque comme si je n'avais pas le même McCourt en français. Ce ne sont pas les bons mots, ce n'est pas la même expérience.* [Well, I just read this passage in both languages. I wanted to find the same feeling but I am very disappointed, sometimes it's almost as if I did not have the same McCourt in French. They are not the same words, it's not the same experience.]

Silvestre : *They talk about the Giants, a baseball team, while in France, they talk about it as if it is a soccer team. Like, it's the biggest insult you could make about baseball ; it's translated by a French person, from France, who obviously doesn't know anything about baseball or the US, right ? You can't just switch from baseball to soccer, it's not just the words, you change the whole environment. You've disregarded something important.*

Jessica : *McCourt pèse ses mots, il les ressent, mais on dirait à certains endroits que le traducteur, lui, prend le premier mot qui fera l'affaire plutôt que de réfléchir au mot exact, celui qui transmet la même émotion, le même contexte.* [McCourt weighs his words, he feels them, but it seems that in certain places, the

translator on the other hand takes the first word that will do the job, rather than think of the exact word, the one that will convey the same emotion, the same context.]

Silvestre: *C'est juste que c'est essentiel, de trouver les bons mots. [It's just that it's essential, to find the right words.]*

Johanne: *Puis le traducteur, il doit faire passer les mêmes sensations et tout, avec ses mots. [And the translator, he has to convey the same feelings and all, with his words.]*

Would any group of people have spent such time noticing words, highlighting them, debating them, at times vehemently so? Words seemed to matter to us, knowing them, using them appropriately, respecting them and understanding their value.

Writing

Particularly attentive to words, we also expressed interest in writing.

In my Memory Journal, I had stated:

> *There is something about writing, something about choosing the words with great care or even letting the words invade the page as they will. There is something terrifying and wonderful at once about allowing them to linger in print, knowing they can be permanent, wondering how they might be interpreted.*

During our one–on–one conversation, Judith spoke of finding fulfilment in writing from a young age, entering writing competitions: "*I would win the essay. From really early on, I would write and win essays, you know, little books and little trophies and stuff. I was all, I had a facility with language and writing and it brought me pleasure, satisfaction.*"

Miles let us know about his own interest for writing: "*I would have loved to have a writer's notebook. I love writing short things, intensely."* And his Memory Journal was strewn with memories connected to writing, for instance:

> *I remember sitting in church with a pad of yellow paper. I don't remember how I got it. Must have been a gift. I had that yellow pad and I would write out the story that we heard in Sunday school or in the sermon, or a reading. It was like I was writing the bible. M.'s Bible Stories. Sure to be a best seller. Almost as big as the history of the world. THE WORLD ! Another writing project. I felt powerful and driven. The world needed my history of the world. It would be short. No need to blather on. I would choose to write, and I would choose to stop.*

Silvestre mentioned taking pleasure in writing, although having been discouraged at school:

> *J'aime écrire, j'ai un grand respect pour ceux qui savent écrire. Mais je dois aussi dire que j'ai une relation étrange avec l'écriture. Comme une relation qui a longtemps été secrète. J'ai souvenir seulement d'embuches et de difficultés avec l'écriture quand j'étais jeune, à l'école. Pas qu'on rabaissait mes idées. Je n'ai pas souvenir qu'on me disait que mes idées ou que ce que j'avais à dire n'étaient pas intéressants, au contraire, mais mes faiblesses au niveau de la grammaire et de l'orthographe venaient tacher régulièrement mes travaux, tu sais, de rouge. Écrire, aimer écrire, c'était juste pour moi.*
>
> *[I like writing, I have great respect for those who can write. But I must also say that I have a strange relationship with writing. It's like a relationship that was kept a secret for*

a long time. I only have memories of obstacles and difficulties with writing when I was young, in school. Not that anyone belittled my ideas. I don't remember anyone saying my ideas or what I had to say wasn't interesting, it was the opposite, but my weaknesses in terms of grammar and spelling regularly marked my work, in red, you know. Writing, liking writing, I kept that to myself.]

Nidia shared that her first memories of writing were to her grandfather, in Israel:

Mon premier souvenir de l'écriture, c'est des lettres que j'écrivais à mon grand–père, en Israël, le seul grand–parent qui me restait mais que je n'avais jamais rencontré – j'ai fait sa connaissance quand j'avais 15 ans. Je voulais lui expliquer ce que je faisais à l'école, les cadeaux que je recevais, lui donner le nom de mes amis, le remercier de ses cadeaux. J'y mettais tout mon coeur. J'ai commencé dès que j'ai appris à écrire en lettres cursives, à 4 ans, en maternelle. Je n'aurais pas pu l'exprimer, mais j'avais une volonté, un grand besoin, de tisser ce lien familial. Comme adulte, mon livre préféré est 'Les fils d'Abraham', de Marek Halter, car il raconte l'histoire de sa famille depuis ses origines jusqu'à nos jours, à travers celle du peuple juif, et j'aurais aimé écrire l'histoire de ma famille de la même manière.

[My first memory of writing, it's the letters that I wrote to my grandfather, in Israel, the only grandparent I had left but that I had never met – I met him when I was 15 years old. I wanted to explain to him what I was doing at school, the presents I was receiving, to give him the names of my friends, thank him for his gifts. I put my whole heart into it. I started as soon as I learned to write in cursive letters, when I was four years old, in kindergarten. I could not have expressed it, but I had a willingness, a great need to build that family connection. As an adult, my favourite book is 'The Children of Abraham', by Marek Halter, because he tells the story of his family, from its beginnings

until modern times, through that of the Jewish People, and I would have liked to write the story of my family in the same way.]

Eleonore spoke tentatively, almost apologetically, about liking the Friday compositions in school :

I didn't really write that much outside of school, but I was really okay with the compositions in school. I know they were compulsory but I think I saw them as opportunities to dive into writing. I always made them funny, something happening in all my stuff. We wrote a composition every Friday, which is always better than some of our classes now, and I know they probably were a burden to many other students, and I shouldn't have looked forward to them, but I did.

She later emphasized her yearning for writing but also for having something valuable to put to paper :

The writing thing. Its something I always feel I want to do, I have always felt I wanted to do. It's important. And Frank McCourt does that too, right, because he is telling them [the students] how important it is to write but he really only starts to write his stuff after he retires. And so I thought that was hopeful for me. Why am I not making it a priority ? In some ways I am waiting until I know exactly what it is I want to say. It's that important.

I observed that the words we used to address writing were commanding (i.e. "terrifying and wonderful", "to dive into writing", "put my whole heart into it"), and I noticed that we spoke of writing in personal ways, with connections to people and situations that affected us on an emotional level, whether positively or negatively.

Reading

There was a great deal of conversation about and reflection on our attachment to reading.

Judith said:

> *We had a traveling library and you were allowed to borrow books, four books a month and eight books for the summer. They had a selection that was way beyond what we had in the school or anywhere I knew. I took out the maximum number of books from the travelling library for 11 years, I think, and I made sure I read them so they lasted until the next time. That was a highlight.*

Later, she also shared:

> *I probably spent more time with books than most people, including myself, spend reading from their devices now. Reading about other places allowed me to grow outside the confines of my small town and to see that there was so much of the world out there to see. It also showed me that there were injustices in the world that needed attention.*

As was the case for words and writing, the relationships to reading that were described were not cerebral, nor mechanical.

In our first collective session, I spoke of my childhood memories of reading:

> *We were read to all the time, and it's memories of, you know, being freshly bathed and being in my pyjamas and being cuddled on the bed… sometimes it was picture–books and other times it was chapter books, and sometimes it was*

books we'd read several times before, and other times it was the newest book – it didn't really matter, it was that moment, that specific moment for me.

In my Memory Journal, I remembered a reading contest that led to a story of friendship and evolution:

In high school, one day an announcement was made for a reading contest focusing on The Fountainhead (Ayn Rand, 1943). I do not remember the exact details but my friend L. and I, both voracious readers in our personal lives, got excited about the new and auspicious (we felt) prospect of combining reading for school and reading for the pleasure of reading. Although no one at the time spoke of literature circles, we dealt with the novel in a very literature circle type of way. We read on our own and then discussed the story, the words, the lines and everything above, beyond and in between. We debated and disagreed, approved and disapproved. It was not just about The Fountainhead. It was L. and I ourselves. It was about establishing friendship, too. I do not remember the outcome of the contest. Probably neither of us had won, or I might have a clearer memory of it, but I can say without a doubt that we felt ourselves growing through our hours spent on the phone.

Lynn remembered one particular book, in an olfactory reminiscence:

Il y avait un livre, un livre de contes. Il était dans la bibliothèque et on allait le chercher, toujours au même endroit, pour le lire. C'était LE livre. Je me souviens même de son odeur. Il avait une odeur juste à lui. Son odeur.

[There was one book, a book of tales. It was on the bookshelf and we went to get it, always at the same place, to read it. It was THE book. I even remember its smell. It had a smell that was unique. Its smell.]

Eleonore spoke of developing connections with the characters: "*I liked how series kept me involved in the lives of the characters. I liked to get to know all sorts of characters and experience life with them.*"

She talked of being pulled into books:

I had a new novel. I started reading it in the afternoon. I don't remember what was happening that I had actual time to read the novel, or maybe I just took the time and everybody else did whatever they felt like, but then I read until I finished the book. It was, you know, 3:00 or something in the morning, I had to go to work the next day, but I did it anyways. And it was such a vacation.

She spoke of reading with her brother:

I had a little brother, he was 8 years younger than me – I had a sister too – but so when he came, I ended up reading to him a lot. I loved reading aloud. I loved reading with him.

And she also told us of reading alongside her father:

My dad was a voracious reader. He was in the British army after the war had ended, so he'd read like tons of war books. It was as if he had missed it, the war, so he relived it through reading it, and he read all the time. And my dad was

very distant with us. He'd lost his mom when he was 2, she died at 29 giving birth to twins. There we were, the two girls – my sister and I – and he really didn't know what to do with us, so he really would push us away all the time. But what I discovered is that if I got a book and I went on the sofa and I curled up next to him while he was reading, then he was quite happy to have me there and it wasn't like he was ignoring me, it was like we were together and reading. So I did tons of that. It was really my only opportunity to kind of have my dad to myself and to have that sharing time. That moment when you sit together and share a story is just wonderful, it does just bring you all together.

Silvestre spoke with passion about books:

Un moment fort de ma vie, je suis en 6e année, donc on est rendu assez loin, j'ai appris à lire et tout, je suis à l'école, mais je me rappelle d'avoir reçu comme méritas des livres. Et je les encore à la maison tellement ces livres–là m'ont marqué; un sur la terre et la croûte terrestre, et l'autre sur le corps humain. Je les ai gardés précieusement, parce que pour moi, c'était signifiant, ce n'était pas n'importe quel cadeau. Et pour moi, ça, ça a vraiment marqué ma jeunesse.

[A highlight in my life, I was in Grade 6, so we were already advanced, I had learned to read and everything, I was at school, but I remember having received books as prizes. And I still have them at home, that's how much it impressed me: one on Earth and the Earth's crust, and the other on the human body. I kept them preciously, because for me, it was meaningful, it was not just any gift. And for me, it really impacted my youth.]

In his interview, he talked about reading and connectedness, that is building and maintaining relationships with oneself and others through books:

> *J'ai toujours été entouré de livres. Les livres me mettaient en contact avec moi–même sous tous mes angles, même avec ma spiritualité. Quand deux personnes échangent sur un livre, c'est comme un moment d'intimité. Quand mes enfants ont grandi et se sont retrouvés à aller à l'école et devaient faire des lectures, je m'efforçais – et ce n'était pas vraiment difficile – de m'intéresser à leurs lectures, de lire ce qu'ils lisaient. C'était des opportunités d'être connecté à mes enfants.*
>
> *[I have always been surrounded by books. Books put me in touch with myself in all my different perspectives, including my spirituality. When two people talk about a book, it's like a moment of intimacy. When we read with our students, when we discuss, when we write about the things we read together, it's a real conversation that takes place. When my children grew up and were going to school and having to read certain things, I would push myself – and it was not really difficult – to be interested in what they were reading, to read what they were reading. These were opportunities to be connected to my children.]*

In his interview, Miles talked about his love of reading: "*I tend to resent the end of a book. I want to find out what's going to happen but I'm actually – and I've never said this – I'm actually angry that they [the characters] are leaving. I feel kind of abandoned. "*

His love of reading was only more striking when he addressed the complexity of it:

Reading is not easy. It never has been for me. I actually can get terrible headaches. I really, really love getting lost in a book and it almost never happens. I put myself in impossible situations so that I'll read.

Nidia spoke of being a reader and giving access to reading:

Je lis, et j'ai toujours lu, plusieurs livres par semaine, et souvent plusieurs à la fois. J'aime tellement lire que je veux communiquer mon amour des livres avec tout le monde.

[I read, and I have always read, several books per week, and often several at once. I enjoy reading so much that I want to communicate my love of books with everyone.]

In my Memory Journal, there was the following: *"To BE a reader. Not to do reading, not to engage in reading, not to practice reading, but to BE a reader. I AM a reader."*

As I contemplated what we had shared, I noticed in our words that reading seemed to be a thing of all senses, present in various garbs throughout the various epochs of our lives, entangled in our relationships (with ourselves and others), participating in our evolution, provoking and evoking emotion.

Stories

McCourt was a storyteller, who seemed to think that his storytelling was a way of occupying time until he figured out how to really teach. This triggered conversation about stories.

In our first collective session, I said, "*the stories were him [McCourt] being himself in the absence of knowing*."

Judith related to McCourt: "*Like me, he didn't have a grip for a long time on what was happening, he was just playing it by ear until he started to connect through his stories."*

I found interesting that when we addressed stories at different times, it was not just about the personal stories recounted by those to whom they belonged, but also the human connection when a story is delivered, read or told aloud. Miles, for instance, said:

> *There's something about the person that seeps into the story they're reading, you know? So it's, it could be a story I've read a million times but hearing someone, especially my mom, reading to me was something very special.*

In that same vein, Nidia also spoke of the give and take of stories:

> *Mon père me lisait des histoires ou m'en racontait tous les jours (comme l'histoire de mon frère Médor qui était un chien et un prince en Roumanie!) Je me les racontais tous les soirs avant de m'endormir dans mon lit. Quand mon père était malade et restait au lit, je lui racontais à mon tour les histoires.*
>
> *[My father read me stories or told me stories every day (like the story of my brother Médor who was a dog and a prince in Romania!) I would tell myself these stories every night, before falling asleep in my bed. When my father was sick, he would stay in bed, I would, in turn, tell him stories.]*

Miles pointed to the fact that we all have stories to tell: "*Finding out what is extraordinary in the smallest details of your own stories, that really comes out. Everyone is a storyteller, you know?"*

Nidia agreed: "*Nous sommes tous de vraies personnes avec des histoires à raconter."* *[We are all real people with stories to tell.]*

Many stories were told along the way of our conversations – perhaps Palmer's (2004) *"vulnerable stories"* (p. 123) – attesting to this.

For example, we heard about Miles's father and about the family moving around a lot:

> *Well, being such a light, easy–going guy, my father, he would burn bridges everywhere he'd go and get himself sort of like, not kicked out from one church but let's move him over here instead. So they moved him a lot so I moved eight times and went to eight different schools.*

Eleonore also expressed a complex relationship with her father, one that eased into friendship as time passed:

> *He was quite demanding and he had a, he was kind of quick to temper, and he was, he was quick to sort of criticize too. I was really lucky my dad lived for a long time because it meant that we ended up getting to know each other and becoming friends. When we were– when I was growing up, he was, he was, he was difficult with us. And then as soon as I had my son, Dad's opinion of me transformed. He said to me, "You're a wonderful mother and I wish I'd had a*

mother like you." And he just – something happened and this whole barrier dropped.

We learned that books and reading were a staple, a constant, in Silvestre's complicated family life, as he stated it:

Parce que tout le monde dans ma famille aimait lire, donc autant la famille était totalement dysfonctionnelle, autant dans toutes les maisons, que ce soit ma sœur, mes deux frères, mon père, ma mère, il y avait toujours des livres.

[Because everyone in my family liked to read, so as much as my family was completely dysfunctional, in every house, whether my sister, my two brothers, my father, my mother, there were always books.]

Johanne told us about her parents and her dream of becoming a missionary in order to travel:

En fait, moi, mes parents– mon père a une 4e année primaire, pis ma mère est décédée quand j'avais 10 ans – puis dans ma famille élargie, il n'y a personne qui est allé plus que secondaire 5. Quand j'étais jeune, au primaire, je correspondais avec des missionnaires. Alors je voulais être une missionnaire peu importe – c'était pas la religion – je voulais voyager, surtout, j'étais très attirée par les gens d'ailleurs.

[In fact, my parents – my father only completed grade 4, and my mother passed away when I was 10 years old – and in my family, there is no one who went beyond secondary 5. When I was young, in elementary, I wrote to missionaries. So I wanted to be a missionary no matter what – it wasn't the religion – I wanted to travel, above all, I was attracted to people from other places.]

There were many such stories, about us. There was Nidia's arrival to teach in Canada, with a winter coat in mid-August, with a taxi driver who dropped her off in the middle of the small town, with no planned place to stay. She had never been to Canada before. There was Silvestre's fantastic teacher, the one who loved to read and thoroughly conveyed his passion for reading but who was assassinated a year after he retired. There were Judith's seizures and hospital stays as a young child, which connected her even more to reading. There was Eleonore who owned a photography studio before coming to teaching, and who regularly adjusted colours on her friends' television sets, and Johanne who, as a child, collected coins from sailors passing through her waterfront hometown… On and on the stories went as we connected to each other.

Bad Experiences

In sharing our stories, a number of us evoked perceptions of bad teaching and negative experiences of school. In his Memory Journal, Silvestre wrote: "*I saw so many failed moments of teaching when I was a student,"* a point he also brought to a collective session.

While we highlighted the importance of reading and writing for ourselves, several of us specifically addressed school reading as inconsequential, at best, and even downright displeasing.

In her interview, Nidia said: "*L'écriture a joué et joue encore un très grand rôle dans ma vie, mais j'ai détesté les exercices d'écriture à l'école… J'adorais inventer des histoires, mais à l'école on n'encourageait pas du tout la créativité."* [Writing played and still plays a very big role in my life, but I

hated writing exercises at school… I adored inventing stories, but at school creativity was not at all encouraged."]

I believe I knew exactly what she meant, having written about the same kind of experience in my Memory Journal:

> *I really do not have many memories of reading – real reading, pleasurable, meaningful, captivating reading – associated to school. I remember texts, but not the engulfing pleasure of reading, I remember tasks: book reports, questionnaires, oral presentations, but not the relationships with the stories and the characters (at school, they never became a part of my life). At school, though I was always a fluent reader who enjoyed reading aloud, I remember reading as being difficult, painful, homework-oriented. I remember boxes of SRA laminated reading cards and endless homework I dreaded doing. I remember reading aloud in grade 8, right after the person sitting in front of me and before the person sitting in back, and stumbling on the word photography (or was it photosynthesis?) in English, not knowing where the accent went. I remember that embarrassment, the intense heat rising to my cheeks and the fear of looking up from my textbook to other students having noticed my mispronunciation. As I remember my school experiences, there was no reading for the sake of reading, no belonging, no connections.*

Judith spoke of instruction that did not take into account her needs, making her feel invisible as a student:

But it's interesting, I remember going to school and they would teach us, in grade 2, they taught us phonics, and I couldn't figure out why they were teaching us this subject, because I already knew how to read. So it didn't really make sense at all in the context, you know, figuring out words and sentences. They weren't paying attention to what I could do or what I needed. No one seemed to care about me as the student, just maybe about what they thought they should be teaching. (Judith)

At the first collective session, Eleonore told us of her humiliation by an art teacher (a story she mentioned again at all collective meetings, as well as in her interview and Memory Journal):

… well, I did my Art degree and then switched to Art Education, because I had a 'great' Art teacher who held up my drawing and got the whole class to laugh at it, and then excused me from ever having to draw again that year. It was already Easter, so it wasn't that long – it was a terrible Easter bunny… But what happened was, of course, I didn't draw for the rest of the year in her class, and I didn't draw from then on… I didn't sign up for the art course in high school, I just stayed away.

Nidia also talked of humiliation, by a grade one teacher she loved:

I knew from the first day that I went to school that I wanted to be a teacher. But it really happened when I was 6 years old, in first grade, the equivalent in France, I remember. I loved my teacher, even though she made me sing in front of the whole class to show how bad you can sing. And I still remember that and I refused to sing for the rest of my schooling.

In our first collective conversation, when listening to the others talk about bad experiences of teaching, I suddenly felt the weight of my own such experiences, remembering:

> *It's funny though, we're talking about negative experiences and I didn't even really realize until just now as we're all talking about school, when I was in grades 4 and 5, all I can remember of those two grades are things like book reports and forced compositions. And I even remember, we were away for the long weekend, Thanksgiving long weekend, somewhere at a cottage that my parents and friends of my parents had rented for the weekend. And my entire weekend, I was trying to figure out how I was going to write about fall for the 15th time or whatever. But again, we had to write about fall and it had to be something very traditional, and we had, you know, a specific number of paragraphs, and it wouldn't be creative at all, and I remember how much that weighed on me. The whole weekend, all I can remember is that particular composition on fall, and yet, I loved words, I loved writing. I loved it from the start. I can't figure out how I kept loving it even though all the pieces of writing we did for a great number of years were that kind of book reports and compositions where you had to have 4 paragraphs and each paragraph had to have 3 sentences. Like, you couldn't deviate from the norm, and it's weird because I completely loved writing and loved reading despite this…*

How solid we were in our love of reading and writing, our love of learning, that we were unwavering in the face of adverse conditions…

Whisperings of the Who

I sensed the who, thought I saw the who, hiding, winking, murmuring and sometimes waving frenetically, in all that we had expressed, all the vulnerable stories exposing our truth, as Palmer might say. Respectful of Arendt, again cautioning me not to confound the who and the what, not to draw unwarranted conclusions, but also encouraged by Moustakas to give credit and attention to my ever-growing awareness, I considered what our words had divulged about us.

In this place of reflection where Moustakas' (1990) illumination and explication phases overlap, there were several important observations.

I had established that we felt the pull towards truth, valuing honesty, sincerity, authenticity.

We acknowledged moments of self-doubt, experienced self-deprecation, evident in our teaching beginnings.

We were life-long learners, seeking out learning experiences and gaining fulfilment from them.

We believed in talk, revering words as unique vehicles of meaning and self-expression, and articulating language as profoundly linked to our identity.

We had a strong attachment to reading and writing, one that could not be shaken even by the more negative experiences we had encountered in school. In fact, it struck us as well that we had become language and literacy teachers despite any of these negative experiences. This was a source of wonder in our discussions, that what Silvestre called *"failed moments"* and Judith

refered to as *"instances of unconstructiveness*" of teaching had given rise to teachers. Miles had raised the question:

> *I'm wondering, I'm hearing about these bad experiences and it sounds like it's a common thing so how is it that teachers still became teachers despite the bad experiences? Usually you say: "Hey! I heard this great song, maybe you'll like the band." You don't say: "Hey, I listened to this awful song, maybe you'll like the band."*

In reflecting on Miles' question, I felt this was the signal that we were on to something, the whisperings of a secret. If I hoped to understand the connection between the who and the what, it was time to start looking at those themes or headings which were grouped under the conceptual category 'About teaching'. Chapter 8 delves fully in the explication phase, finalizing the analysis, opening our eyes to the secret hidden in plain sight.

Chapter 8 – The Secret Hidden in Plain Sight

Then, one day, something amazing happened. My idea changed right before my very eyes.

(Yamada, 2013)

The investigation questions were: How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of a definition of self? What commits us to such teaching? This entailed that we consider the who, our who, and the what of teaching, in particular literacy teaching. While no questions towards defining teaching were ever directly posed during the study, such information seemed to permeate our thinking from beginning to end, whether in our collective discussions, our interviews or in our Memory Journals. Having explored, in the previous chapter, themes and headings under the 'About Us' conceptual category, I now moved to those grouped under 'About Teaching'. It is in addressing what was said about teaching that I felt myself move solidly into Moustakas' (1990) explication phase of deeper sense-making[11].

What is Teaching

First, there was the vagueness of our original concept of teaching, highlighted by Eleonore's statement: "*Yeah, I don't think I could have defined teaching. Even once I had gotten through teacher training, I suddenly realized I really didn't know what it was. I wouldn't have been able to define what it ended up being."*

[11] Excerpts included in this chapter were selected with attention to avoiding redudancy and remaining concise, while fairly representing the content and ideas put forth, and giving every participant a voice.

It was also present in Miles' comment: "*I strongly disliked the idea of teaching. It's actually teaching that made teaching interesting."*

Added to this nebulousness was the idea that something enjoyable cannot be referred to as work. I spoke about it:

> *You can't be doing something as a job that you're really having so much pleasure doing, and those relationships with the kids and all of that human side of things was just, it was too real and too engaging to actually be my job.*

Silvestre said: *"I was doing something but – that wasn't called teaching, I mean, it probably was not what I was supposed to do because it was fun.*"

Could this ambiguity, not knowing what teaching was, have led to our self-doubt, to our feelings of being impostors in teaching? Nidia addressed this: "*J'ai souvent eu l'impression d'être un imposteur en enseignant car, quand on aime vraiment ça, on ne sent pas qu'on travaille vraiment. Je n'avais aucune idée à quoi m'attendre, quoi attendre de l'enseignement." [I have often had the impression of being an impostor in teaching because, when you really like it, you do not feel as though you are really working. I had no idea what to expect, what to expect of teaching.]*[12]

There was the notion, brought with humour to our conversations, that teaching was about superficial details. A number of participants appeared to relate to this, as was evidenced by their reaction to Miles' memory:

[12] My English translation of excerpts is provided in a separate font, within square brackets, immediately following or underneath the original French version, wherever applicable.

...I remember being in great admiration that he [the teacher] could draw those brackets. And he had one of those compasses that go on the board, and I thought those are the reasons you get to be a teacher, you get the big scissors, you get the compass, you learn how to draw brackets on the board, there's something there.

To which several seemingly agreed, with understanding chuckles that underscored an element of truth in the matter. In fact, Judith admitted: *"Oh, I remember looking, watching my teachers make brackets at school and knowing that I would not be a teacher because I could not make those brackets."* Teaching was about using the chalk on the blackboard, having the opportunity to choose helpers, calling the office using the intercom button, and so on.

Not only were we unsure of what actually constituted teaching, but we had held, or had been exposed to, negative perceptions of teaching as a career.

Nidia's parents had not been pleased when she had indicated that she wanted to be a teacher:

I always wanted to teach little kids, but my parents said it was not enough. You know, in France, it's not the same if you're teaching elementary school, we don't have the same salary and you're not considered as a teacher. So my parents said, "Non, non, non. You want to be a teacher, okay, fine, it will do, but you have to teach at least high school."

In my Memory Journal, I questioned the value afforded to teaching:

When, some years ago, I started consciously reflecting on my career in education, I wondered about the value I had originally placed on teaching, prior

to working as a teacher. In my final years as a high school student, as is often the case, there were a number of instances where our professional future was evoked as we were told we were making very important academic decisions that should be aligned with our ambitions, and that our ambitions should reflect our true potential. I clearly remember the look of pride (from family), awe (from peers) and admiration (from other adults in my environment) as I stated that I was planning to become a lawyer. And in sublayers of consciousness, while I was convinced I did not want to be a teacher, I know I believed at the time that the reaction would not be the same if I said I was planning to become a teacher. I do not understand that feeling, because my parents were fabulous teachers who believed in education and because most of the adults who were questioning me were proud teachers. From where did my impressions of their possible devaluation of teaching stem? As I began teaching, I also remember running into past acquaintances and peers, and hesitating when asked what I was now doing. Again, in underlayers of consciousness, I worried that teaching was somehow not significant enough. Where had this idea formed?

At our first collective session, several of us had stubbed our toes on the following words of wisdom from a principal to a teaching Frank McCourt: "If you've got any ambition to rise in this system, principal, assistant principal, guidance counsellor, the letter in your file will hold you back." (McCourt, 2005, p. 24). *"Rise in the system"*… giving the sense that teaching is not an ambitious career in itself.

During that conversation, Judith stated: "*McCourt says on page 4 « teaching is the downstairs maid of professions » Maybe that- maybe this is one of those things that is believed, without really being said. That if you stay in teaching, you have not really succeeded. "*

In his Memory Journal, Miles wrote that, originally, he would have agreed: "*One thing for sure, is that I always thought that it was a letdown, a failure, a lack of success elsewhere that led people to teach."*

We also spoke of the misconceptions around the complexity of teaching. Eleonore highlighted:

> *Everyone thinks they can teach. I think for most people, how hard teaching is does come as a surprise, that is when they have an opportunity to do it – teach, that is. There's this impression that it just happens, and so it's not really a demanding career.*

Wading through the ambiguities and the negative impressions, we pursued the various conversations, systematically – I noticed in hindsight – trying to define teaching without having been asked to do so. I thought of Palmer (2004) who discusses projections, those expectations others have for us, or interpretations they make of us, the definition they give us:

> As soon as we succumb to someone else's definition of who we are, we lose our sense of true self and of our right relation to the world. It makes no difference whether those projections make us the hero or the goat: when we allow others to name us, we lose touch with our own truth (p. 102)

Perhaps teaching was the what, rather than the who, but was this persistence in trying to define our own teaching, facing the vagueness and less than favourable outside perceptions, a way of neutralizing the projections to validate our truth?

Connectedness

Palmer (2007) writes: "Good teachers possess a capacity for connectedness" (p. 11). We agreed that teaching was about engaging with the students, in truthful connections.

Nidia said of teaching that it was about knowing the students:

> *C'est connaître ses élèves. Faire apprendre c'est connaître ses élèves pour savoir ce dont ils ont besoin, ce dont chacun a besoin, ce qui va faire avancer chaque élève. Nous, on n'avait pas de matériel tout fait alors on créait notre propre matériel et ça nous faisait réfléchir à ce qu'on faisait, là où on voulait en venir avec les élèves. Ce sont les élèves qui comptaient. Il fallait bien les connaître.*
>
> *[It's knowing your students. Teaching, it's knowing your students to know what they need, what each student needs, what will help each student progress. We didn't have ready-made materials so we created our own materials and that made us think about what we were doing, where we wanted to go with the students. It was the students who mattered. You had to really know them.]*

Following a comment made by Miles, about looking not at aspects of teaching, but at education as a whole, I suddenly understood more about my preference for teaching in elementary school rather than high school. It had everything to do with the students and connectedness:

I was reflecting on your comment that once you had gone into teaching, it wasn't about the specifics of teaching, it was education as a whole. It's funny, when you said that: "I was thinking of teaching as opposed to education." Why would you make the difference? And I realized that for me, elementary education initially grabbed my attention more than high school because of that possibility of the whole as opposed to just a piece of things. Even though I love language teaching and have specialized along the way, it was the wholeness of elementary teaching, addressing children, being connected to students, as opposed to coming in and addressing the subject. I mean that's not necessarily the right perspective but I had never realized that I thought that before you made that comment.

In the first collective session, as she discussed what she perceived as 'authentic' teaching, Eleonore spoke of those difficult students who make teaching real:

There are the kids, the ones whose names you know in, like, the first 15 minutes, those are the kids you are carrying with you and hope they have done O.K. Teaching is about those kids and you with those kids.

And in the last collective session, she said:

In the classroom there are students and there is joy, I mean, there are moments to laugh about and moments to cry about and there's so much going on which makes it a special place. Teaching is living, with real people, young people, with kids.

In her Memory Journal, she also wrote about the students, with a focus on genuine relationships:

> *Teaching is all about the students. There is a performance there and, you know, setting things up just so and winning them over, but feeling the real relationship develop.*

In her interview, Eleonore shared a story of teaching as connectedness:

> *Did I tell you this story? There is this student I had in Grade 5 – she's been really sick since about halfway through high school. She had something where her digestive system shut down. Anyway, I met her at the pharmacy with her mom and so she told me that she'd been so ill. Her dad died when she was in grade 4, and I had her in grade 5, and so she wanted to write about that a lot at the time and I completely encouraged her. I mean, I didn't push her towards that and I tried to get her to do other writing as well because I didn't want her to over fixate but clearly it was a huge thing in her life and she needed to express it in lots of different ways. So she did a lot of writing about that, and anyway when I saw her, she said to me: "You know what gets me through? It's really hard, I don't see my friends a lot, I don't feel well, but what I do, I write about it. And that really, really helps." And then she said to me: "'And I write because of you. I've been hoping to see you so I could tell you." And that was something. You know what, if I never hear from another student, it was worthwhile. If I have one person who is surviving something because she's writing, because I allowed her to find that, then it was worthwhile. You know, teaching is about growing people, being and becoming people together.*

Lynn, in our one-on-one conversation, referred to this connectedness and spoke of teaching in terms of personal involvement:

> *Pour moi, enseigner c'est… bien des fois, le soir, je me remets à penser à tout ce qui s'est passé pendant la journée, toutes les conversations. Tu sais, moi je travaille avec les adolescents et c'est une petite école, alors les relations sont hyper intenses, personnalisées. C'est ce qui me nourrit. C'est ça enseigner, pour moi.*
>
> *[For me, teaching is – many times, at night, I start to think of everything that went on during the day, all the conversations. You know, I work with teenagers and it's a small school, so relationships are super intense, personalized. That is what feeds me. That is teaching for me.]*

In our second collective session, Silvestre remembered a particular teacher with whom he had connected :

> *I remember Mr. K. He was Jewish and he knew I was quite involved with the Presbytarian church and all that. So he and I would, you know, he would ask about my cross and I would ask about his lamb and we would laugh together. But he also made science fun and it was all about the little things. Taking pleasure in the little things. Being together, not just in the same room but building the connection, not just him getting to know me but me getting to know him, and learning together. This is the way I see learning and teaching.*

He was echoing Palmer (2007), who writes that "the connections made by good teachers are held not in their methods but in their hearts, meaning heart in the ancient sense, as the place where intellect and emotion and spirit will converge in the human self" (p. 11).

Profession and Vocation

A long, active deliberation was held over several sessions, and even often intruded upon the one-on-one conversations, regarding the professional and/or vocational nature of teaching. Buijs (2005) had prompted my own reflection on the topic, much before the study began. As a group, we started with Frank McCourt (2005). We could not reach a consensus as to whether teaching, for him, was a profession or vocation. Some of us deemed that teaching was a vocation for McCourt, and that the hardships he faced as he struggled to comprehend his work were a sign of his inner destiny to teach, rather than a reflected, intellectual choice. Nidia summarized this:

> *Moi, je pense que c'est une vocation, oui, je pense qu'il a la vocation d'être prof. Il n'a pas eu les bons professeurs, il n'a pas eu le bon milieu, ce n'est pas facile, il n'a pas confiance en lui du tout, et il n'est pas encouragé non plus par les autres, mais il a des résultats, et quand il a des résultats avec ses élèves, ça le touche profondément. Il reste en enseignement même s'il ne sent pas que c'est valorisé. Oui, je pense que c'est sa vocation: il était fait pour être professeur, pour enseigner.*
>
> *[I think it's a vocation, yes, I think he has the vocation to be a teacher. He did not have good teachers, he does not have the right milieu, it's not easy, he does not have confidence in himself at all, and he is also not encouraged by the others, but he has results, and when he has results with the students, it touches him deeply. Yes, I think it is his vocation: he was made to be a teacher, to teach.]*

I underlined as well: *I feel like every time he moved on to something, I feel that whenever he attempted to move to something he thought might be more important in terms of career, he missed the kids, he missed the students, he would come back. He did not feel right elsewhere.*

However, there were those who questioned McCourt's dedication and who felt that teaching was a profession, a difficult one, which he chose but for which he did not deploy the necessary efforts for improvement, his successes and failures being a consequence of happenstance. Eleonore said:

> *So he's often very self-deprecating and he's not always self-aware either. He's taken on teaching and he says he wants to improve, to do better, but he's not sure of whether or not he's doing a good job, or whether or not he's doing the right thing, he says he should be doing this or that, when he starts saying, you know: « I should be a disciplinarian, I should be all these things. » But he doesn't. I didn't believe him anymore, because he wasn't doing any of that. He's chosen a career, and it's difficult, but he's just waiting for it to magically work out. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. To me, that's not vocation. But it's not professional either.*

Miles agreed:

> *Like I said, he [McCourt] seems to be just wandering, not making any clear effort or decisions or following any direction whatsoever. I don't see his drive, so that can't be vocation, and I was disappointed or frustrated that there was a lack of hard work to make this a profession, also.*

Gradually, it emerged from the reactions of various participants that there was a perception of vocation that belittled the investment required to be a good teacher; somehow, having the vocation to teach would make one exempt from working at it.

In the first collective session, Johanne said:

> *Moi, je ne sais pas, je n'ai pas senti une illumination à enseigner, quelque chose au fond de moi. C'était un choix comme un autre, je crois, mais, en tout cas moi, j'ai travaillé après, ça, oui. Beaucoup travaillé.*
>
> *[I don't know, I didn't feel an illumination to teach, something inside myself. It was a choice like any other, I think, but in any case, I worked at it, that, yes. Worked hard.]*

Reflecting back on this in a later discussion, Silvestre suggested:

> *Peut-être que dans le temps, quand c'était des religieux, les professeurs, c'était une vocation, comme la vocation de devenir prêtre, puis après on ne se questionne plus, on n'a plus à faire quoi que ce soit vraiment. C'est juste qu'on enseigne. C'est ça qu'on fait. Mais là on sait qu'il y a beaucoup de travail à faire. On ne devient pas seulement enseignant parce qu'on a le goût, parce qu'on se sent enseignant. On doit faire des études, puis même quand on est enseignant on ne doit jamais arrêter d'apprendre, de s'améliorer. On doit être professionnel.*
>
> *[Maybe in the past, when the teachers were nuns or priests, it was a vocation, like the vocation to become a priest, but after you no longer question ourselves, you don't need to do anything more, really. It's just that you teach. That's what you do. But now we know there is a lot of work to do. You don't just become a teacher because you feel like*

it, because you feel like a teacher. You have to pursue studies, and even when you are a teacher, you can never stop learning, improving. You have to be professional.]

In response to this, Eleonore shared:

> *I was accused in a very nasty way of it being a vocation and not a profession for me, by others, when I was teaching. Well it was said to me by a colleague in a very negative sense right, because I was going above and beyond, and they felt everything was easy for me, and that that was a bad thing. I think that's the first time I ever thought in terms of profession or vocation. But I think I'm okay with it being a profession too. I think that being professional and having as a profession – not just a job, you know – something you work at to be good at it, it's pretty fulfilling.*

We felt we had worked hard at teaching since day one, so several participants were reluctant to attach themselves to the notion of vocation if it was exclusive of hard work, as some interpreted it. This was an angle I had not considered, that teachers would take offense to the concept of vocation. In my head, vocation had a beautiful, poetic aura, and profession a much more rational, emotionally–detached definition, and neither was exclusive of the other. I had anticipated a discussion around a compromise of sorts, somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, an uncovering of a vocation that led to a choice to be professional, perhaps, rather than a rejection of vocation.

But the reflection on this topic did not end there, or then. In another discussion, Lynn felt that she had had a vocation for teaching, that she had then lost because of a lack of professionalism, which she meant as knowledge or expertise:

> *Depuis tout petite, je savais que je voulais enseigner. Mais je l'ai perdue [ma vocation] à un certain moment, à ma première année d'enseignement. Je n'étais absolument pas professionnelle. Ça m'a fait perdre ma vocation.*
>
> *[Since I was very little, I knew that I wanted to teach. But I lost it [my vocation] at a certain point, in my first year of teaching. I was absolutely not professional.]*

She explained that she returned to teaching after a decade, once she felt she had developed sufficient professionalism. She believed that for vocation to thrive, it had to be matched with professionalism.

Some thought that the concept of vocation was erroneous, in that it was used in hindsight to justify passion or natural talent that could have also been well-invested elsewhere and could have yielded positive results in another area of the work-force.

Judith explained:

> *I remember everyone saying I would be a great teacher but for me it was always anything but teaching, right ? Obviously not. But… and so the thing to do after an undergraduate degree in African anthropology was to look at teaching. So it was an elimination process really. And now that I have spent my entire life doing it? Well I think, you could say now that it is a vocation. Yes, I could clearly see it as a vocation, but that's not saying – there could have been several other*

possibilities. I could have ended up in a different direction and have been good at that, worked at that, and then thought that was my vocation, right?

Miles highlighted:

Vocation, it's like revision of history. I mean, you end up saying "Wow! I got to this point that is really me," then you look back and you find all the pieces that led to that. But if you'd taken another path, you would have said "Oh, look at all these other pieces that led me to this other path!"

Eleonore seemed to consider a vocation extremely constricting, as though to admit she had a vocation to teach would mean she could have had no other possibilities, could not have done well elsewhere:

Is a vocation the one thing ? I think I was going to be a rock star. That's my vocation. But I just didn't pursue it because I didn't have the ability to pursue it for a number of reasons. I mean, that's what would be closest to my heart. But we don't necessarily get to do that. But I mean, I am not thinking that I am any less of a teacher or an educator just because I don't feel it is necessarily the only thing, the only place I could have gone.

In our last conversation, I was speaking of my job as a board administrator, and I admitted to missing teaching:

In my job now, I am farther removed from teaching and I really miss that piece, and the fact that I do miss it was a huge surprise. Not that I ever said that I

wouldn't miss it, but I am so surprised that after not having chosen teaching in the first place, I actually miss teaching that much, with that intensity, you know ?

And Nidia said to me:

But what is that commitment to teaching ? What do you call it ? I mean, otherwise you wouldn't be missing it. Teaching would have been something you did and you moved past it to something else. You could look back just thinking you had a great time, but if you miss it so much, so what is that ?

Despite group discussions and one-on-one conversations bringing back vocation and profession to the surface under various guises, the debate on our teaching seemed unresolved.

Palmer (2007) writes:

> The call to teach does not come from external encounters alone – no outward teacher or teaching will have much effect until my soul assents. Any authentic call ultimately comes from the voice of the teacher within, the voice that invites me to honor the nature of my true self. (p. 30)

What was the nature of our true self that we were invited to honor? Through this question, I began wondering if, perhaps, teaching for us was not the vocation in itself. I thought of the voices in the "About us" category of themes and headings, voices that spoke of truth, life-long learning, language, words, reading and writing. Indeed, these seemed to call from within ourselves, revealing our who, even when they did not mention teaching per se. I heard them again now, this time specifically in relation to teaching.

Truth, in Teaching

As we valued truth in ourselves and in others, we recognized and appreciated truth in teaching.

McCourt (2005) writes, "You'll have to tell the truth or you'll be found out." (p. 113), to which Eleonor added, in our second collective meeting: *"You have to be authentic too. You need to be truthful in what you say and what you do. Kids need to know you're in this together*."

Judith expressed the necessity of sincerity in teaching:

> *Well, I guess it [teaching] makes you consider who you are – I mean we talked about real learning – and especially if you want to be good at it, helping the students to be successful. You know, in the past many years now, I mean for a while, we've talked about using authentic resources, but it's not just about the materials. Students figure out pretty quickly if you are not sincere, if you aren't honest, if you're trying to be someone you are not.*

In defining teaching, truth was also expressed as vulnerability. Miles was first to bring it up:

> *McCourt is more vulnerable with the kids, like they are on the same playing field. He is less of an authority figure. He's someone who is exploring life like they're exploring life. No one has it worked out. That's also me, I think, but that means you are true, you are vulnerable. Being a teacher for me is accepting that, to be vulnerable.*

In a later session, Lynn said that vulnerability and honesty on the part of both the teacher and student were essential conditions for teaching and learning:

> *Moi, je travaille avec des élèves qui n'ont pas toujours la vie facile. Si je leur montre que je suis vulnérable, honnête, ils finissent par croire en moi et ça, ça change tout. Ça ouvre les portes. Sans ça, ils ne peuvent pas se laisser aller, accepter d'être vulnérables aussi. Sans ça, ils ne peuvent pas apprendre et puis, moi, je ne peux pas leur enseigner.*
>
> *[I work with students who don't always have an easy life. If I show them that I am vulnerable, honest, they end up believing in me and that, that changes everything. Without that, they cannot let their guard down and accept to be vulnerable as well. Without that, they can't learn and I can't teach them.]*

In one discussion, Johanne, seemingly surprised at her own thought, suddenly interjected: "*Enseigner, c'est quand même personnel. Je me dis que c'est accepter d'être humain, mais même encore plus d'être soi-même, et puis de le montrer.*" *[Teaching, it's personal, though. I'm thinking it is accepting to be human, but even more so to be yourself, and to show it.]*

In teaching, truth was important, needed, validated.

Learning, in Teaching

It had been established within our group that, as individuals, we had sought out learning from our earliest days onward, and continued to do so (see Chapter 7). We also valued it in teaching, seeing the opportunities for it.

At the first meeting, Johanne shared: "*Je pense à M. McCourt qui dit « Je pensais que j'enseignais; j'apprenais. » Pour moi, je vois ça plus comme ça. Apprendre plutôt qu'enseigner, dans la classe."[I am thinking of Mr. McCourt who says: "I thought I was teaching; I was learning." For me, I see it more like that. Learning rather than teaching, in the class.]*

Later, she again emphasized learning in teaching: "*Yes, they [the students] bring you something, they force you to go places, within you, you know. You get better and grow older and… better. It's about you learning at least as much as them."*

In her interview, Eleonore spoke of learning as an opportunity to seize in teaching, "*I love the learning that is teaching…learning about the students, learning new ways to understand something, finding a wonderful book or poem, learning how to be a better teacher, a better person."* She also stated: "*Teaching, well, there is opportunity for joy and for learning for everyone, maybe especially the teacher*." In her Memory Journal, she wrote "*I was always learning myself, that is what I think teaching is and what I enjoy about it."*

In the second collective meeting, I said: *"Quand je pense à tout l'apprentissage que j'ai pu faire grâce aux élèves… oui, des plus enthousiastes, mais surtout, au contact des plus indifférents." [When I think of all the learning I have been able to do thanks to the students… yes, the very enthusiastic ones but especially, in contact with the most indifferent ones.]*

In our one-on-one conversation, Silvestre talked about his curiosity, how it characterized him and how he had found a place for it in teaching: *" Comme je l'ai déjà dit, j'ai toujours été curieux. Dans la classe, on peut, on doit être curieux. J'avais la permission d'être curieux. C'était mon*

travail d'être curieux, d'encourager les élèves à être curieux et de chercher les réponses avec les élèves." *[As I said, I have always been curious. In the classroom, we can, we must be curious. I had permission to be curious. It was my work to be curious, to encourage the students to be curious and to look for answers with the students.]*

Miles wrote in his Memory Journal: *"It is through the questioning and the action of teaching that the true understanding comes, my understanding."* Some pages later, he wrote: *"So what I learn through teaching helps me in my personal life and vice-versa. The learner is a teacher and learner. The teacher is a teacher and learner. And the learning goes deep."*

It appeared that while we may not all have chosen teaching, we had all chosen, and kept choosing, learning.

Words, in Teaching

As raised in Chapter 7, words were important to us. In various forums including in our conversations about McCourt's (2005) book, we had noticed and discussed them at length. They also were very present in our stories of teaching.

In my Memory Journal, I had shared a story of words:

> *There was a box in my class, a word box. Whenever one of us, a student or myself, came across a special word, one that sparked our senses, one that made us giggle, one that did not mean what we thought it should, one that felt ugly or beautiful, smooth or prickly, happy or sad, we put the word in the box. At the end of each day, we would pull out one word at random, and we would talk*

about it. Oh the conversations we had! The laughs, the disagreements, the stories; one word was all it took to launch us. One day, I had been absent and the substitute left a note on my desk. It said: "What in the world is a word box??? The students told me I absolutely need to get one because you find amazing words in it."

During our last group meeting, Nidia spoke of the joy of teaching words to students: *"Mes moments préférés quand j'enseignais ont été d'apprendre des mots spéciaux aux élèves (en 1re et en 2e année) et de leur faire savourer."* *[My favourite moments when I was teaching were to getting the students to learn special words (in 1st and 2nd grades) and to let them savour them.]* To savour words… not just to think them, say them, even feel them, but to savour them, in reading, writing and speaking.

Johanne spoke of sharing words with her second-language students: *Quand tu enseignes la langue, tu utilises tes mots puis les élèves, ils doivent trouver leurs mots. Au début, ils t'empruntent tes mots mais après ils doivent trouver leurs mots.* *[When you teach language, you use your words and the students, they have to find their words. At first, they borrow your words, then, they have to find their words.]*

Words mattered to us, and we found opportunities to appreciate them openly in our teaching, sharing them and our love of them with our students.

Stories, Talk, Reading and Writing

Personally, we cherished stories, and treasured talk, reading and writing. In our teaching, we found joy in bringing them to light; they were indispensable.

Judith spoke of storytelling as connected to the who, providing opportunities to build essential relationships:

> *Storytelling is not what we do, really it is more about who we are. Storytelling binds the students to the teacher, a means of building a bond between teacher and student. Relationships are key to teaching, and storytelling is essential to that*.

Miles addressed the teaching of writing, underlining the importance of developing with his students a sense of belonging to a community of authors:

> *You tell the kids you – we – are authors, we're creators, we can write and create and the way we can find out about tools is looking at authors and looking at creators and then saying we're a part of that community of authors.*

In speaking of writing, he underlined that in his classroom, every idea has worth:

> *In the classroom, it's about allowing every idea value. If you are allowing every idea value, then individual ideas can have great value and everyone, all of us, can make significant contribution. It can all start within my classroom. That's what is great about teaching.*

About talk, Eleonore said:

> *I think many of us – and that includes me – become teachers because we like to talk and we can do that in our classroom, with our students. Learning to let them talk is hugely important. I've learned I can do that, but I still need to remind myself to hold back at times. There are many times I talk my thoughts through with them [the students], as much for me as for them, maybe.*

Judith spoke of the innumerable hours she had spent reading as a child and, told us how, through the characters she encountered, she uncovered the world in all its highlights and downfalls. Then she said: *"I think all of these things contributed to my sense of fulfilment in a career where there were children to help and places to go."*

When Eleonore spoke of her love of reading, and in particular of reading aloud to her younger brother, she concluded: *"Reading aloud was the thing I looked forward to since I started as a teacher. Really, I love reading with someone, and I got to do that regularly in my teaching."*

Nidia, a self-proclaimed avid reader, spoke of being a reader and giving access to reading:

> *J'ai toujours voulu enseigner au primaire car on y enseigne tout, pas une matière en particulier, et la lecture peut être partout. J'ai adoré enseigner en première année, voir l'étincelle quand les enfants débloquent en lecture, quand ils réalisent qu'ils peuvent lire. La porte s'ouvre et je suis là, avec eux. J'adore la lecture et avec moi ils y ont maintenant accès. C'est fantastique.*
>
> *[I always wanted to teach at the elementary level because there we teach everything, not one subject in particular, and reading can be everywhere. I loved teaching in grade*

one, seeing the spark when the children catch on to reading, when they realize they can read. The door opens and I am there, with them. I love reading and with me they now have access to it. It's fantastic.]

In his interview, Silvestre expressed his love of reading, writing and talking, of the connectedness he found in all three. Then he spoke of reading, writing and talking with his students: "*Quand on lit avec nos élèves, quand on discute, quand on écrit sur les choses qu'on a lues ensemble, c'est une vraie conversation qui s'installe.* *[When we read with our students, when we talk together, we we write about the things we read together, it's a real conversation that settles in.]*

Miles wrote in his Memory Journal:

> *Teaching allowed me to pull the curtain back and talk about the great, wonderful Oz, to express thoughts behind thoughts, thinking/codes/secrets behind the what we do. Reading was a piece of me revealed. Writing was a field of dreams to be explored in depth if I so chose… I was brought to break the silence and to open the floor so that students' opinions, point of view, meaning mattered. And I mattered for real.*

Why Literacy

And I mattered for real.

From the start of this investigative journey, I had felt my own interrogations around literacy. Why literacy teaching? Why literacy? As I had grappled with the questions that would drive this study, there had seemed to be somewhere undefined, a strong statement for literacy. However, despite its seeming conviction, the statement always ended with the spirit of a question. Why? We were

investigating literacy teaching as becoming a part of a definition of self. Beyond what the literature might say, why was it literacy, in particular, for us? In his five words, 'And I mattered for real,' Miles had taken hold of what seemed to be an answer: in literacy, we mattered.

At the last collective meeting, Eleonore shared with us :

> *I loved art and I was the art specialist for a year, but my problem with it was that it was too removed from everything else that the kids knew we were doing. And so I felt like we were making pretty pictures or objects, but we weren't really expressing anything, growing really. I could teach them [students] skills but I couldn't really get in there, know them better so that I could teach them to say anything or express anything. Literacy teaching, literacy, that is how things changed. Being a classroom teacher and focusing on the student and on literacy rather than being the art specialist, allowed me to use art, but to express something, show something, understand something that you didn't before. Make connections. Be. I could be me, the students could be themselves.*

Judith spoke of literacy as inevitable: "*Literacy lives with you in a certain sense, or in you . How can anyone even be without literacy ? You cannot teach and avoid literacy. You cannot circumvent literacy at all.*"

And Eleonore responded: "*Literacy speaks to what is important and is not always easy to catch. It's communication, and understanding, and creativity, and thinking. You can tie literacy to everything that matters. Well, really, literacy is what matters."*

Miles later added the words that anchored my thoughts: **"***Sometimes teaching literacy becomes more about you than the students*."

About us. There was that connection. Earlier in my reflection, I had sensed the who in the themes described in the 'About us' category, namely truth, words, stories, talk, writing, reading. Miles' statement, our conversations, revealed that our teaching, literacy teaching, might be about us.

And then a pivotal moment, a turning point occurred as, looking back, I understood something vital about our conversations and reflection. Eleonore had said: "*We all write our lives. Some of us just record this writing more than others. And some of us share it*." Unknowingly, she had highlighted a misconception in my original questions: How does literacy teaching become an integral and personal part of a definition of self? What commits us to such teaching? In our conversations, literacy was not lurking outside ourselves; it stood proudly at the center, as the individuals tapping into themselves, as the *who* looking within and calling out through various means, in connection to others, to all other spheres and dimensions. Our stories and discussions repeatedly pointed to the fact that literacy does not become a part of self; literacy is self. I knew then that the more pertinent question was: How does our definition of self connect us and commit us to literacy teaching?

Through this new lens, I contemplated my own words in my Memory Journal:

> *Depuis toute petite, j'écrivais des poèmes que j'ai rapidement consignés dans un petit livre bleu avec l'image de Holly Hobby sur la page couverture. À dix ans, j'ai commencé à chanter. J'ai gagné des concours, fait des spectacles, écrit quelques chansons. C'est une passion, c'est moi, cette créativité. Lorsque je me*

suis retrouvée dans la classe, c'était un peu ma scène. Je pouvais écrire avec les élèves, animer la classe, produire des spectacles à petite et grande échelle. C'était à la fois une source de créativité immense et un forum hors-pair pour la représenter.

[From very early on, I wrote poems that I quickly kept in a small blue book with the picture of Holly Hobby on the cover. When I was ten years old, I began to sing. I won contests, participated in shows, wrote a few songs. It is a passion, for me, this creativity. When I found myself in the classroom, it was a bit like my stage. I could write with the students, rally them, put on small-scale and large-scale productions. It was both a source of immense creativity and an incomparable forum to represent it.]

I considered these ideas of literacy and creativity, and of the classroom as a source and forum. I then reflected on Nidia's words as she expressed the acknowledgement of her truth in teaching:

J'étais d'une timidité maladive. Pourtant, je ne me suis jamais dit que je ne pourrais pas enseigner. Il y a des gens, comme moi, qui sont très timides mais qui arrivent à s'extérioriser, à se laisser aller à la créativité, dans un travail qui leur donne la permission de le faire. Je croyais que je jouais un rôle quand j'enseignais, mais peut-être que finalement, avec les élèves, en pouvant être créative sans jugement, j'étais moi-même, en plus grand.

[I was extremely shy. Yet, I never told myself that I would not be able to teach. There are people, like me, who are very shy but who can let go of that, allow the creativity to take over, in a job that gives them the permission to do so. I thought I was playing a role when I was teaching, but maybe, in the end, with the students, able to be creative without judgment, I was myself, even more so.]

I thought back to the bad experiences we had encountered in school. Nidia's teacher telling her she could not sing. Eleonore's teacher telling her she could not draw. The endless, often meaningless reading and writing assignments that weighed heavily on our natural penchant for self-expression and creativity. And, again, I thought of Miles' question:

> *I'm wondering, I'm hearing about these bad experiences and it sounds like it's a common thing so how is it that teachers still became teachers despite the bad experiences? Usually you say: "Hey! I heard this great song, maybe you'll like the band." You don't say: "Hey, I listened to this awful song, maybe you'll like the band."*

Whether we had been singled out by our teachers to show the class how incompetent we were, or repeatedly asked to perform the same meaningless tasks, the less appealing paragraphs of our studenthood somehow combined to provide stories of hopeful teaching and success for us. Why?

When Eleonore mentioned her humiliation by her elementary art teacher, she put forth, as a possible answer to this question, that we were trying to ensure a better educational experience for other students:

> *And it wasn't until I was 26. I started to go back to school. But I said, "I want to do an Art degree." I went in with a bunch of people who'd been drawing their whole lives and just started drawing and painting. And then I decided that I was going to teach in elementary, and I was going to teach Art in elementary, because I wanted all kids to feel that they could spend their life being able to draw for their own satisfaction. Not necessarily everyone can be an artist, but then I needed to catch them before they got to high school, because I had good*

art high school teachers and I never went to those classes because I already knew I shouldn't be there, so that was my whole reason. And I met other people, a lot of teachers have the awful teacher experience that made them decide they were going to become teachers because they were going to change that and make sure that kids didn't have to do that.

This was a noble, plausible explanation, with which Nidia seemed to agree, in light of her own experience of humiliation by a teacher: *Moi, je me suis dit que je voulais être prof pour ne jamais faire ça à un élève. [I told myself I wanted to be a teacher to never do this to a student.]*

However, we had not all become teachers to counteract a bad experience of teaching we had had, and to provide a better experience for future generations. I felt there was more to this.

I thought of Nidia, who highlighted a love of reading that existed and persisted despite school:

… I remember I loved reading all the time, and I loved and I needed to read several books at the same time and everything, but at school, it was always boring, because it was all old books. We read only what they had stored somewhere, so you know it was the old books from 1900s, and it was not at all appropriate for us… But I still loved reading, it didn't kill my love of reading, it couldn't. I remember, we were given the books our first day of school and while the teacher was talking, I would read them on my lap. I would read all the books the first day, and then it was finished and I could read my own books, real reading, at home.

I thought of Miles, who was surprised to find himself flourishing in teaching when he had never wanted to teach in the first place: *And I would not be caught dead in that profession. Funny how now, it is here I feel most alive!"*

Palmer (2000) writes, "Discovering vocation does not mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess" (p. 10).

In speaking of our teaching despite the negative occurences of teaching we had faced, Lynn suggested that who we were was stronger than what we had experienced:

> *Moi, j'aimais l'école, parce que je réussissais bien. J'arrivais à plaire aux enseignants; je faisais tout comme on me demandait. Mais je crois, peut-être que ce que nous étions déjà était encore plus fort que toutes les expériences qu'on a eues. Peut-être qu'on s'est rattachés aux expériences les plus positives parce qu'elles nous ressemblaient davantage, et que les personnes que nous étions même à ce moment-là – quand on était à l'école, je veux dire – nous ont permis de soit ignorer les choses négatives, ou de les intégrer différemment pour qu'elles soient mieux liées à ce que nous sommes ?*
>
> *[I liked school, because I did well. I managed to please the teachers; I did everything as I was asked. But I think, maybe what we already were was stronger than all the experiences we had had. Maybe we held on to the most positive experiences because they resembled us more, and because the people we were even at that time – when we were in school, I mean – allowed us to either ignore the negative things, or to integrate them differently so that they were better connected to who we are ?]*

In Lynn's words, I heard Whyte's (2015), similar to Palmer's, defining vocation and the journey to our understanding of it:

> A true vocation calls us out beyond ourselves; breaks our heart in the process and then humbles, simplifies and enlightens us about the hidden, core nature of the work that enticed us in the first place. We find that all along, we had what we needed from the beginning and that in the end we have returned to its essence, an essence we could not understand until we had undertaken the journey. (p. 8)

Maybe literacy teaching as a professional endeavour was a way for us to fulfill our commitment to our true self, our passion for language, literacy and creativity, our vocation for truth, our essence, our who.

Trajectories

It was then I felt the 'About us' and 'About teaching' categories meld, becoming one, the who and the what coming together. I looked to the heading 'Trajectories' for clarity.

Because this investigation was designed as a collaborative endeavour, and trajectories and turning points (Elder, 1985; Sampson & Laub, 2005) were identified as a focus from the start, I had raised the question early on. Could we identify and describe those transitions or turning point episodes within our trajectories that led us to literacy teaching? I had anticipated key events, or significant happenings. Silence. At first, I had no answers whatsoever. Where were the great stories I would help disseminate through this study? None of us seemed be able to identify transitions and turning points. In conversation and writing, we retrieved our stories, uncovered some of the building

blocks of ourselves, recalled anecdotes that expressed our who, but nothing arose that was so structured as what I had imagined a trajectory might be, and nothing so momentous as what I had envisioned as a turning point. I was disappointed, thinking that somehow I had failed to establish the proper parameters, and that we were adrift in our reflection, getting lost on a parallel road.

However, I later saw that there were many transitions and turning points expressed. We had even used the right vocabulary, for instance the expression *turning point*. We simply had not recognized these pivotal moments as connected to our trajectories.

Some were located in our childhood.

There was Miles' story of the teacher who gave him positive feedback on his understanding of text, a turning point in his perception of his self-worth and of the value of his contributions. Through a discussion on reading, he was validated as a person:

> *Mr. P and I spoke for about half an hour about books and ideas, and he told me that while others may be better at French, I had come farther and learned more than any of the others. I was moved by this because I was not accustomed to hearing any positive comments about my progress. And then came the turning point. Mr. P. said that when it came to reading, I understood the deeper meaning and was able to create strong comments about text… or perhaps he just raised an eyebrow and smiled and I took it to mean all of this, but I chose to remember a powerful conversation. And I was deeply moved. He had just told me that my thoughts matter and that I was able not just to describe the rock, but lift it up and comment on the world of the scurrying crabs underneath. He taught me about*

faith in humanity, evidence-based perspective that leads to self-reflection and boosts courage. He was telling me that who I was mattered, that my ideas could be useful.

Eleonore's story of the grade 6 teacher who had the perfect accent for reading aloud was a turning point in her awareness of reading aloud as the source of a powerful shared experience:

Mr. R. was my grade 6 teacher. He was from Yorkshire, England. He had a sense of humour but he was old school, with a quick, fierce temper. He read aloud "The Hounds of Baskerville" to us. It was the first more mature book that I had heard/read. It was captivating! Especially as he had the perfect accent, which made it even more dramatic. I'm sure teachers read aloud to my classes before, but this is the one I remember. He changed something about reading for me. It was grand. I was fascinated with the way I felt when he was reading, like we were with him somewhere special. When I started reading aloud to my students, I often thought of Mr. R. and I hoped I was bringing to them what he had brought to me.

Nidia's story of suddenly understanding the connection between letters, words and creating meaning was a turning point in her view of the world as filled with rich sense-making opportunities:

À quatre ans, en maternelle, j'ai soudain pu décoder le mot écrit par l'institutrice sur le tableau noir à la craie blanche. "Pâtisserie", ce fut une révélation! Je connaissais toutes mes lettres mais je n'avais jamais réalisé

qu'elles pouvaient former des mots qui avaient du sens. J'ai marché jusqu'à chez moi, comme sur un nuage, en répétant "pâtisserie".

[When I was four years old, I was suddenly able to decode the word written by the teacher in white chalk, on the blackboard. "Pâtisserie", it was a revelation! I knew all my letters but I had never realized they could form words that made sense. I walked all the way home, on a cloud, repeating the word "pâtisserie".]

Other such moments seemed to have occurred when we had already begun teaching.

Johanne spoke of the time she realized that she and her students were free to express opinions, and that she had been the one to lead her students to take their place in the conversation. This was a turning point in her perception of herself as a person with opinions, able to prompt conversation for others, and of the classroom as a forum for authentic speech:

Moi, je crois qu'il y a eu un moment important un jour quand j'ai eu une discussion avec mes élèves, une vraie discussion. Je n'avais pas planifié ça, et puis c'était en langue seconde alors les conversations, c'est pas toujours au point ou très élaboré, mais on s'était mis à parler de quelque chose et puis tout d'un coup je me suis rendu compte qu'on parlait vraiment. Les élèves avaient des opinions. On réagissait les uns aux autres. C'était pas grand chose, mais j'avais un peu l'impression de les avoir amenés à ça, à quelque chose de plus important que juste une activité en classe. Je l'ai jamais appris à l'école, à donner mon opinion. À l'école, on n'a jamais demandé mon opinion. Mais avec mes élèves, j'avais des opinions, j'étais quelqu'un, une personne, et eux aussi

avaient le droit d'en avoir, des opinions. Ils étaient aussi des personnes qui avaient besoin de comprendre les choses.

[I think there was a turning point one day when I had a discussion with my students, a real discussion. I hadn't planned that, and it was in a second language class so conversations, they aren't always to the point or very elaborate, but we had started talking about something and all of a sudden, I realized that we were really talking. The students had opinions. We were reacting to each other. It wasn't much, but I somehow had the impression that I had brought them to this, to something more important than just a classroom activity. I never learned that in school, to give my opinion. In school, no one ever asked me for my opinion. But with my students, we were free. I had opinions, I was someone, a person, and they also had the right to have them, opinions. They were also people who needed to figure things out.]

I recounted a striking moment tied to a book I had read aloud to my class:

S*o I had this book I received when I was ten years old, Les Chemins Secrets de la Liberté, the Underground Railroad by Barbra Smucker. It was a revelation to me, because it was a girl close to my age and it was, you know, a real story. I mean, it wasn't the exact story, but it was a story that was very realistic and I couldn't believe that somebody my age would be going through those things… I read it over and over again for myself, and then much later on I read it to my students. But the first time I read it to a class, I read the first few chapters or whatever, and I was so excited to share it with them, this story I had lived with since I was ten. We talked and talked, spontaneously, I mean not with me asking a question about page 3 and them answering, but just talking because we were all interested. And then the students all ran to the library to try to get the book*

from the library but it didn't exist there, it was my own book. And the librarian came to see me in a panic, why had I asked my students to go get this book at the library. But I hadn't asked anything, I just was reading it. And I addressed my class, saying, "You know, I will continue reading it, you don't need to go get the book yourself." And several of them actually bought copies of the book later on. I remember that feeling : wow! I didn't realize I was, I felt like a bit like I think a singer song writer must feel when they start hearing crowds sing their lyrics. I was thinking: I read a book I love and they all want this book, and I remember that magical moment.

This was a turning point for me, this moment in which I realized that a meaningful who-to-who interaction with my students had occurred through reading aloud a book that held personal significance for me. It divulged the power of human connection through literacy.

The issue in immediately identifying turning points, I realized, was that I had imagined teaching as an end point on the trajectory. I was looking for those clear instances that would show us that we had been on our way to teaching, specifically headed for literacy teaching, those moments we could look back on and think, "If I had paid attention, I would have known." But this is not what I had encountered. Moustakas (1990) states that in the explication phase, "additional angles, textures and features are articulated; refinements and corrections are made" (p. 31).

I had a new understanding.

If teaching is not the end point on our trajectory, if it is not the vocation, and if truth and a passion for learning, talk, language, words, writing, reading and stories are, then it would make sense for the turning points to be moments that not only revealed the vocation, but also the moments that confirmed teaching as the means through which to allow the vocation, the passion, to find a home.

Miles said:

> *So maybe the turning point is when you realize that all of your experience, all of your being, can be useful for something real. And then you realize that your role is not to deliver that experience but to use it to draw out the experiences that will be, the literary people your students will become, the beings that are connecting to themselves, in contact with every piece of who you are.*

Silvestre told us: *"There was this magical moment when I realized that everything I have ever done, tried, experimented with, been, everything I am is a source of inspiration for my teaching."*

Palmer (2000) stood by, exclaming: "What a long time it can take to become the person one has always been!"(p. 9). Arendt and Dobson smiled, urging me to go on.

It was not that the literacy teaching had merged with self, not that the who had become a part of the what. The vocation was not to teach. Through literacy teaching we had allowed the person we were to become who we had always been. Within the what, the who had found a garden in which to flourish and become. In commitment to our who, our vocation was one of self-realisation, one that had found a voice, a possibility for integrity in action within literacy teaching. Thinking back to the claim made by Douglass and Moustakas, the convincing argument for my choice of

methodology, that “heuristics retain the essence of the person in experience” (p. 43), I knew that this inquiry process, sifting through all of our writing, reflections, conversations and stories, had retained and highlighted our essence, our who, in the experience of literacy teaching.

This was the secret hidden in plain sight. This was our secret hidden in plain sight.

Chapter 9 – Between the Lines: the Creative Synthesis

I am what I am not yet. (Greene, 2001)

The Struggle

Through literacy teaching we had allowed the person we were to become who we had always been. Within the what, the who had found a garden in which to flourish and become (Chapter 8).

We had uncovered this, the secret hidden in plain sight.

Now, Moustakas, Palmer, Arendt and Dobson sat expectantly, the first to see how I would fare in the next and final phase of the heuristic process, the others in anticipation of more revelations of the who in this penultimate chapter of our story: the creative synthesis.

There was an incredible struggle at first, one that left me wordless. Moustakas (1990) writes that the creative synthesis "usually takes the form of a narrative depiction utilizing verbatim material and examples" (p. 32). When I read this, I felt this was exactly what had emerged within the explication phase: our words woven together in the narrative of our narratives, the story of our stories. Where could I possible go next? Moustakas, Palmer, Arendt and Dobson were waiting, and I had nothing left to say.

In fact, for several weeks, I experienced the *syndrome de la page blanche*, the 'blank page syndrome' typically referred to in English as writer's block. I had no words. I was confusing creativity and creative synthesis, thinking I had to look outwards to be more creative than what we, Miles, McCourt, Nidia, Lynn, Johanne, Silvestre, Judith and I already had been.

Thinker's Block

Throughout my life, my father has often quoted Boileau (1815) "Ce que l'on conçoit bien, s'énonce clairement, et les mots pour le dire arrivent aisément" (p. 6) [What is well conceived is clearly said, and the words to express it come with ease][13]. In my anxiety over finding the words, I was not allowing thoughts to fully form, to fall into place. Where thoughts are imprecise, clarity of expression is not possible either. Referring back to Boileau's words, I realized that my writer's block was really a thinker's block. I believe it happened because the creative synthesis was pushing its way to the surface, not waiting to be conjured.

I could have been reassured by Moustakas' (1990) statement that "the researcher must move beyond any confined or constricted attention to the data itself and permit an inward life on the question to grow, in such a way that a comprehensive expression of the essences of the phenomenon investigated is realized."(p. 32). But after having lived intensely with our stories, our words, our data, for so long, I was unable to move beyond. Moustakas urged me forward, and I felt Arendt, Palmer and Dobson looking over my shoulder, but I was unable to gain the necessary perspective.

Moustakas writes "in the creative synthesis, there is a free reign [sic] of thought and feeling that supports the researcher's knowledge, passion, and presence; this infuses the work with a personal, professional, and literary value that can be expressed through a narrative, story, poem, work of art, metaphor, analogy, or tale" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 52). Taking a deep breath, I considered again the larger story, the one that had been recounted over the timelines of our lives in anecdotes and snapshots, from the incubation to the explication, through our words combined.

[13] My translations are provided in square brackets immediately following any quotes in French.

It was then I remembered *La page pliée,* a poetic piece I had written in February 1997, over 20 years ago.

Delivery Through Poetic Inspiration

In the burgeoning stages of my doctoral application, when my investigation question was just an imperceptible flutter in my mind and much before any concrete designs for a study, I had come across my poetic piece from already so long ago:

La page pliée
Jessica Saada – 17 février 1997

À bien le voir
Il n'est sûrement pas du premier âge
Mais en équilibre dans le noir
Sur l'étagère des grandes histoires
Il semble si fier de son image

Par l'usure de sa couverture
On devine le toucher de chaque page
L'odeur de chaque image
Les sons qui ne sont que murmures
Et la poussière du passé qui embrasse le futur

La page pliée
Qui nous indique là où la larme a coulé
Là où le sourire s'est échappé
Là où le frisson est passé
Là où l'âme s'est évadée

C'est elle qui souffle la vraie histoire
C'est elle qui d'un clin d'œil nous fait tout voir
Même ce qui n'est pas raconté
Sur les lignes parfois effacées
Des pages usées d'un tout petit cahier

La page pliée
Qui nous indique là où la larme a coulé
Là où le sourire s'est échappé
Là où le frisson est passé
Là où l'âme s'est évadée

La page pliée
Désinvolte ou volontaire, remarquée
C'est elle qu'on doit se rappeler
Et chaque fois, la page pliée
C'est elle que je retourne chercher

"La page pliée" is the folded page (corner) within a book. We fold it as we read, at times because we are interrupted and want to remember where we left off, at times because the page houses words, thoughts or ideas that struck us, that we wish to remember and to which we hope to return, at times because it reminds us of someone, somewhere, something. The folded page is the lowered gaze, the flushed cheeks, the frank stare, the uninhibited laughter, the wink, the

delicate snowflake, the moodiest downpour. The folded page is the memory of a memory of a memory.

The Folded Page[14]
Jessica Saada

Looking closely
The book is far from its youthful days
Yet carefully seated in the darkness
On the shelf of notable stories
It seems so proud of its appearance

The wear of its jacket
Hints at the feel of each page
The scent of each image
The sounds that are but murmurs
And the dust of the past embracing the future

The folded page
Shows us where the tear ran
Where the smile appeared
Where the shiver came through
Where the soul escaped

It whispers the true story
And in a wink allows us to see all
Even that which has not been told
On the lines, sometimes faded
Of the worn pages of a very small notebook

The folded page
Shows us where the tear ran
Where the smile appeared
Where the shiver came through
Where the soul escaped

The folded page
Casual or voluntary, acknowledged
The one we must remember
And every time, the folded page
Is the one I seek again

When I found it as I readied to apply to the Ph.D. program, this one piece among the many others I have written along the years, I remember that I marveled at meeting with it just then, in the midst of deeper reflection on myself, on my career and on the significant academic adventure that I was hoping to launch for myself. But I soon set it aside, distractedly. Surreptitiously, it remained nested in my mind. It seemed to play hide-and-seek, discreetly attracting my attention here and there as my doctoral journey progressed. Finally, in this phase of creative synthesis, twenty years after composing *La page pliée*, I fully acknowledged its presence on the corner of my desk. Moustakas (1990) writes that creative synthesis is "an original integration of the material that reflects the researcher's intuition, imagination, and personal knowledge of meanings

[14] My translation. Original French version *La page pliée,* February 17, 1997 (Jessica Saada)

and essences of the experience"(1990, p. 50). An original integration, he stated. Could *La page pliée* have been waiting to be revealed as such?

La Page Pliée

While the first two stanzas of *La page pliée* center on the book, the *what*, the true focus is on the folded page, where the soul escapes ("*là où l'âme s'est évadée"*) or where it waves its flag, where it shines a light, revealing the *who*.

We may fold the page with many intentions and various degrees of consciousness or will. No matter the others who may also come across our folded page, the fold is personal and remains ours. As the who is universal and universally unique (see Chapter 4), so is the folded page. Just as in the case of our memories, what emerges from the folded page is not the book itself but the story, not the reading itself but the moment to which it is connected or that it has created, the essence of the book, the essence of the reading, the essence of the reader, the who.

La page pliée points to life trajectories *("La poussière du passé qui embrasse le futur" [The dust of the past embracing the future]*), with transitions and turning points *("Là où la larme a coulé; Là où le sourire s'est échappé; Là où le frisson est passé"[Where the tear ran; where the smile appeared; where the shiver came through]*). It is about stories and remembering, about memories and soul searching, about the whisperings of our truth: *"C'est elle qui souffle la vraie histoire; C'est elle qui d'un clin d'oeil nous fait tout voir" [It whispers the true story; And in a wink allows us to see all]*. In this piece, I enjoin the readers, including myself, to remember, treasure and listen to their who: *C'est elle que je retourne chercher [Is the one I seek again]*.

Within the What, Celebrating the Who

Miles had said about teaching: *And then you realize that your role is not to deliver that experience but to use it to draw out the experiences that will be, the literary people your students will become, the beings that are connecting to themselves, in contact with every piece of who you are.* Within literacy teaching, the what, we acknowledged and shared our folded pages, the who, and, in so doing, guided others to fold, recognize and celebrate their own pages along the journey of their stories.

Palmer (2000) writes: "Before I can tell my life what I want to do with it, I must listen to my life telling me who I am" (p. 4).

Around the table of our research team and thanks to the investigation at hand, Miles, Eleonore, Judith, Nidia, Johanne, Silvestre, Lynn, McCourt, and myself had listened attentively to our lives telling us who we were. Within the many stories, we found whisperings and louder expressions of our who, folded pages throughout a journey that included passionate literacy teaching as a context for self-realization.

Folded Pages

But there is more. Moustakas (1990) writes about heuristic research: "The initial data is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature. I am not only lifting out the essential meanings of an experience, but I am actively awakening and transforming my own self" (p. 13). In finding *La page pliée* I acknowledged with awe that I had successfully experienced the

heuristic process, returning at the end to an artifact of my who that had existed all along, and noticing how much it now resonated with new understandings.

Some folded pages I have ignored along the way, some I have not seen. Some folded pages I have misrepresented, others I have misinterpreted. I have passed moments by in teaching, waiting for the right career to manifest itself. I have passed moments by in life, waiting for real life to begin. I have passed by my who without recognizing it and, as a consequence, even in some of the most rewarding professional moments, I have arched my back against the possibility of being trapped, not in a teacher identity, but in a false identity.

Clarke Moustakas, you have led me well through the maze of my who, giving me the tools with which to pursue the life-long journey of staying attuned to my stories, folding pages and returning to them, but also helping others to do so. Frank McCourt, here must end any self-deprecation, for it is through your honest storytelling, your struggle at finding your truth and alignment along the professional-vocational continuum, your participation in our deepest questionings that we became an us. Hannah Arendt (1998), you were right about the necessity of "sheer human togetherness"(p. 180) to enable the who to reveal itself within stories of the what. This collaborative adventure has given rise to a newfound respect for the power of togetherness in finding my – our – inner light. On this topic, Parker J. Palmer, I must also thank you for the light. You state that "our great calling, opportunity and power as educators is to shed light in dark places" (Palmer, 2007, p. 213), but among the most important of these are our own dark places. Through your words I traveled to my hidden wholeness, a work that will remain forever in progress. Last but not least, Margaret L. Dobson (2015), thanks to your insistent voice along this journey, I now see that what I experienced as a child was schooling, attending to the what,

but what I truly believe in is education, attending to the who. Perhaps this is why I so readily eased into literacy teaching while thinking I was not a teacher.

Et chaque fois la page pliée… c'est elle que je retourne chercher.

In its process and its uncoverings intertwined, like Palmer's (2004) Möbius strip bringing together outside and inside, the who and the what, in a continuous flow, this heuristic inquiry is, for me, already several folded pages to which I will return along the way of more self-revelations.

The Who[15]
Jessica Saada

And there is the who
Inexorable
Same and changing, fragile and infallible, bent and straight
Complex
My who of words, silences, science and faith
Imposing
Muddled and clear, committed and casual, scorching and cold
There is the who, to whom it may concern
There is the who
Omnipresent
Within, throughout, much before, here and now, way beyond
Literary
Euphemism and understatement, alliteration and assonance, flashback and anticipation at once
The you, the us, the we, the him, the he, the her, the she, the they, the them, at times
All
That I do, that I think, that inspires me, that moves me, that I see
That I imagine, that I prevent, that I contain, that I believe
Wherever I am, there is my who, to whom it may concern

[15] My translation. Original French version *Le Moi,* February 11, 2017 (Jessica Saada)

Le moi

Jessica Saada, 11 février 2017

Et puis il y a le moi
Inéluctable
Pareil et changeant, fragile et infaillible, plié et droit
Complexe
Mon moi de mots, de silences, de science et de foi
Imposant
Trouble et limpide, engagé et désinvolte, ardent et froid
Il y a le moi, à qui de droit
Il y a le moi
Omniprésent
En-dedans, au-travers, bien avant, bien ici, au-delà
Littéraire
Euphémisme et litote, allitération et assonance, analepse et prolepse à la fois
Le tu, le nous, le vous, le il, le elle, le eux, parfois
Tout
Ce que je fais, ce que je pense, ce qui m'inspire, ce qui m'émeut, ce que je vois
Ce que j'imagine, ce que j'empêche, ce que je retiens, ce que je crois
Partout où je suis, il y a mon moi, à qui de droit

Chapter 10 – Last Words, Next Chapter

Vision is not enough, it must be combined with venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps, we must step up the stairs. (Vaclav Havel)

I must admit that delivering the creative synthesis, a final stop in this journey, has left me short of breath, almost wordless, wanting to halt and savour. I feel the need to bask in the afterglow of a resolution, inside the bubble of my own thoughts. But there is a call to reflect on the story once again, contemplating the chapters that were written, finding last words that give consideration to the potential chapters to come.

The Idea that Grew and Grew

In Kobi Yamada's (2013) picture book *What Do You Do With an Idea*, a little boy wonders what to do with an idea he has had. He considers walking away, unsure of its worth, but the idea remains, persistent. Gradually, with nurturing and attention, commitment and devotion, the small, fledgling idea grows and grows, until it becomes bigger, much bigger than the boy himself. The questions in this investigation, beginning with how education chose me and how literacy teaching and my self were connected, are the idea that launched the thinking, the small idea that grew and grew.

I stood in hesitation as it grew, for like Yamada's (2013) character, I was uncertain of its worth, its potential for contribution. As it expanded, the idea that began within me turned into questions that could belong to others in an investigation into the who and the what of literacy teaching:

How does literacy teaching become a part of self? What commits us to such teaching? Although the who, elusive and intangible, was difficult to name or define, with guidance from Arendt, Palmer and Dobson, among others, it was established as unique, omnipresent, unchanging in its DNA but constantly evolving at the "moving intersection of inner and outer forces" (Palmer, 2007, pp. 13-14).

With careful consideration for a variety of methodological paths, Moustakas' heuristic inquiry was selected for this journey. Despite its infrequent use in education, it was appealing as 1) it promoted starting with a personal, internal search; 2) it enabled self-study within a relational, collaborative process that held stories (first-person accounts) in high regard, and 3) it focused on bringing to light the "essence of the person in experience" (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p. 43).

Moving into the investigation, the questions now belonged to a group of eight of us, current and former teachers of language and literacy, selected using criterion sampling. Through reading and discussing McCourt's (2005) *Teacher Man*, through collective sessions and one-on-one interviews, through writing and reflection, we reached into ourselves to find and release the stories and revelations that would shed light on our who and our what, the who and the what.

The developing story pointed to a question more pertinent than those from which it had originated. Indeed, I had been misguided in thinking that literacy teaching could become a part of self. The more pertinent question, calling out from amidst our reflection, discussion, writing and analysis was: How does our definition of self connect us and commit us to literacy teaching?

Discussion

Vocation : Who or What ?

Throughout the research conducted, whisperings of our who called out from our vulnerable stories. We valued truth, honesty, sincerity and authenticity; in our teaching, these were important and validated. We were avid learners who cherished and gained fulfillment from opportunities to continue learning beyond any tangible rewards; in our teaching, we could continue to choose learning for ourselves as well as for our students. We treasured words and regarded language as deeply connected to our identity; in our teaching, we found opportunities to appreciate words and language openly. We believed in the power of talk and held a strong and unwavering attachment to reading and writing (Miles had written: "*Another writing project. I felt powerful and driven.")*; in our teaching, talk, reading and writing were inevitable and indispensable. From these whisperings, a voice emerged, louder and louder: our own. Indeed, to my surprise, it slowly surfaced from the current investigation, in answer to the revised question (How does our definition of self connect us and commit us to literacy teaching?) that for the eight of us, the fundamental commitment was not to literacy teaching (the what) as such but to our who, with self-realization as our vocation.

Trajectories

With this answer in mind, there is also something to be mentioned about trajectories. I had begun the journey implicitly believing that, for the purposes of the investigation, the end point on our trajectory was teaching. I had asked our group whether we could identify and describe those transitions or turning point episodes within our trajectories that had led us to literacy teaching. In

the end, the trajectory was towards our self-realization, with the transitions and turning point episodes in fact moments that had moved us along in various ways towards self-awareness and the accomplishment of self-fulfillment as our vocation.

Literacy

Literacy was deliberately included in the investigation questions. Originally, I thought this was simply a reflection of my reality; I was a literacy teacher. Extending much beyond this, and much beyond the fact that all participants were current or former language and literacy teachers, literacy holds an important place in the outcomes of this work. It was at the heart of the investigation and revealed itself as central to human relations. I think back to Grumet's (2006) words about reading, previously cited: "Reading books with other people is part of the continuing process through which relations between people are transformed into psychological possibilities within a person"(p. 212). The fact of reading and collectively discussing McCourt's (2005) *Teacher Man* prompted ease and authenticity of conversation, promoted deeper reflection, enabled relevant writing and thinking to take place, favoured and directed attention to the who, both within and among ourselves. Miles had written: "*Reading was a piece of me revealed. Writing was a field of dreams to be explored in depth if I so chose,*" concluding that in literacy he "*mattered for real*." Judith had stated: "*Literacy lives with you in a certain sense, or in you . How can anyone even be without literacy ? You cannot teach and avoid literacy. You cannot circumvent literacy at all.*" Literacy was not waiting outside ourselves to be caught, found or borrowed. It was within us, had been from our very beginnings. This is why literacy teaching was a way to self-realization, a means to fulfill our vocation, a way to foster our who, a connector

between inside and outside ourselves, the what through which the who could be nurtured and furthered.

Third Things

Also noteworthy are what Palmer calls third things: a poem, story or other work that allows us to indirectly address the topic at hand. The artificial nature of research, namely with its time constraints and its contrived grouping of individuals, might have undermined efforts to foster comfortable, genuine conversation and the divulging of personal stories essential to the current investigation. Referring to Palmer's (2004) words : "We must invite, not command, the soul to speak" (p. 92), I searched for the means to invite our souls to speak readily, openly and without delay. McCourt's (2005) *Teacher Man*, the autobiography of a teacher and storyteller recounting his struggles during a thirty-year teaching career marked with critical incidents, turned out to be exactly what was needed. McCourt quickly became one of us. We agreed and disagreed with him, connected or not to his stories, feelings and reactions. True to Palmer's claims, in focusing on McCourt's stories we found the pretext to reveal ourselves through our own.

Collaboration

Collaboration requires mention here as well. Throughout the investigation, we spent much time considering our careers, from their beginnings to their current existences. In a one-on-one interview, Silvestre asked me what were my best professional learning moments. I did not require pause to reflect. The moments that I feel have brought me the most learning are those opportunities I have had to work closely as a team, whether co-teaching, co-developing, co-creating, co-presenting, co-leading. I asked myself what about these experiences has been so

positive in terms of my own learning. It occurred to me that in each of these team scenarios, relationships were built, trust was developed and people emerged at the heart of the actions taken in the various circumstances that compose daily life in the world of schools and education. This is also what surfaced from the collective time spent within the current investigation as we, the co-participants, interacted with one another, fostering and furthering our reflection and understanding of ourselves and each other.

From Ourselves to Ourselves

Heuristic inquiry was a major discovery. Although it left some practical gaps in terms of data sorting and analysis, which caused me to borrow elsewhere (constant comparison) for a clearer how-to, it was otherwise a perfect fit. I learned to trust it to lead me from myself to myself, while having genuinely explored the revelatory in-between, carefully listening to the stories that carry my own voice. Perhaps this is among the most significant revelations, for I had leaned on heuristic inquiry as a process, never quite imagining the driving force it would be. I observed heuristic inquiry as it deftly guided the members of our group towards thoughtful solitude and meaningful interaction, towards memories and stories, recollection and reflection, discussion and writing, recounting the what and disclosing the who. I consider the 'what-ifs' of this research: what if there had been different or other participants, what if we had used a book other than Frank McCourt's, what if I had not been who I am. It is impossible to predict what might have been remembered and discussed under different circumstances. The particular stories and manifestations of the who that emerged in this investigation may have done so as a consequence of the participants' interaction specifically with McCourt's book and with each other. However, the existence of stories, the existence of the who, these were not tributary to the context and

conditions of this investigation. The who belonged to the participants before and during the research, will always belong to them. Heuristic inquiry was not about producing an outcome, therefore reliant on specific conditions, but about leading us to ourselves, no matter the circumstances.

Investigation and Journey

Also brought to light within this work is a difference between investigation and journey. In the present case, the investigation was conducted in co-participation within a collaborative context. I have spent much time attempting to faithfully represent our stories, understandings and revelations within the collective investigation. However, at the end of the heuristic inquiry process, stepping out of the investigation itself, I realize that the only journey I can fully describe is my own. Indeed, the others, co-participants, entered into the larger story at the moment of the investigation, taking on the questions that had emerged from within me over much time. At the time of their initial engagement, I was already in flight. Critical to the investigation, my co-participants brought their own stories, thoughts, perspectives to the table. I believe they also partook in their own journey, but one which began at a place that is not mine, and that only they, individually, might identify. It would be interesting to know where their voyage has now taken them, following the investigation. Under different circumstances, I would have followed each participant beyond the investigation, down his or her own path. But this time, I have only followed myself. Thus, it is important to highlight that while the story is infused with our collective work within the investigation, the journey recounted is my own.

The Heuristic Gap

There is a last point to be made here, regarding the heuristic inquiry process. The awareness came a year after conducting the investigation.

It was the month of May. In a large conference room, more than 800 educators were gathered: teachers, consultants, in-school and board-level administrators. A number of us had come here reluctantly to attend an imposed three-day session on what we feared might be another proposed miracle cure for the problems of education. A panel of speakers stood on stage. I could feel my own scepticism and tried to tame it. The first speaker launched into his initial words. He began by showing us pictures of his family, recounting with humour the challenges of being married to a teacher and the hopes and aspirations he had for his children. With a mix of self-derision and a measure of pride, he spoke of the meanders of his own life. The mood shifted in the room, from a "here we are at a conference" to a "here we are"; I sensed it in myself and in the people around my table. The woman sitting next to me whispered "I really like this guy! He is real." While this was a very public setting, he was speaking to each of us from within, and, as a result, I was – we were, it seemed – ready to listen and to hear from within. Dobson (2014) states that "Although who is invisible to the eye, who is nonetheless identifiable by a reason of a felt radiance"(p. 194). I felt that radiance, the real possibility of a who-to-who connection. Would I have been able to identify this before my journey of heuristic inquiry?

Moustakas (1990), in discussing the impact of heuristic research, quotes Polyani (1962) who writes:

> Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking

> differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery (p. 56).

So it is, now that I have crossed the heuristic gap, an irreversible voyage, that my reflection on the who permeates my every day. As a researcher in this work and a practitioner all around, post heuristic reflection, in all of its implications, now trickles into my memories and past considerations as well as into my current practice, perspective and future plans.

Considerations and Implications

One Who, Many Whats

I return to Palmer's (2007) question, brought forward in a previous chapter, "Who is the self that teaches?" (p. 7). I think of the eight of us involved in this investigation, distinct individuals participating in addressing questions of the who in literacy teaching. I reflect on the disclosures that seeped into our words, revelations connected to honesty, sincerity and authenticity, to our love of language, reading and writing, our attraction to life-long learning. It is clear from our conversations that these were not academic or professional qualities per se, even though they may have brought us to teaching, were useful to us in the teaching of literacy and found a place to flourish there. Rather, they belonged to our person, whisperings of our who. For each of the eight of us participating in this investigation, there appeared to be one who, an unfragmented whole evolving in various spheres and dimensions. For us, the who that teaches was the who of our childhood, the who of our studenthood, the who of our memories and stories… **the** who.

A participant at a provincial workshop on coaching that I attended a few weeks ago raised the following question: "But what happens to the beginning teacher in that in-between time, as she

develops the persona of a teacher." There were many nods of agreement and understanding around the room, in compassion, I believe, for the early career teacher. Fuelled by my intense reflection on the question of identity, I immediately wrote down: "What persona?"

If we believe that teachers must develop a persona, if we expect that teachers must find their way to a new identity separate from themselves in professionalism, we are creating a gap between the teacher and the task of teaching, and we are giving the message that teaching is an artificial endeavour, one that asks that we remove ourselves from our work. Thomas and Beauchamp (2011) write "For a teacher, the self encompasses not only notions of 'Who am I?', but also 'Who am I as a teacher?' (p. 763). In light of my investigation, I would propose that the second question might instead be 'Who am I in teaching?'. More reflection is required, not on professional identity, or professional dimensions of identity, but on the who as one, evolving within various contexts.

Instinctive Impressions

I think of school administrators whom I regularly hear saying that their instincts never fail in the hiring process. What does this mean? I look back at meetings held with student teachers, at interviews conducted with teaching candidates or at evaluations made of teachers.

I remember one instance when my colleague and I, as school administrators, were holding interviews for a teaching position. The first two candidates were quite experienced and had solid résumés. The third, a young man who now sat in front of us, had very little experience in teaching, and none in the particular subject area for which we required a teacher. When the young

man left, we both felt he was the right fit. But of course, that alone was not solid justification for our hiring him. I now wonder, if it was not in his curriculum vitae, in his academic or prior professional experience, what were the convincing arguments?

In another situation, I walked into a classroom unannounced, for a teacher evaluation. The room was noisy, slightly chaotic, but I saw the young teacher interacting with her students, heard her speak, saw her move around the classroom and, within minutes, felt the potential that she held. This was someone whose development I looked forward to supporting. I now ask, why?

I can also think of several opposite situations, where I seemingly observed everything that was on the official checklist and yet was uneasy, felt something amiss in the person teaching or asking to. Again, why? Based on what?

Always, I dealt with instinctive impressions of people, what might be called gut feelings, positive or not, that were difficult to circumscribe or clearly identify, try as I might to objectively consider them. Arendt's (1998) words come to mind: "The manifestation of who the speaker and doer unexchangeably is, though it is plainly visible, retains a curious intangibility that confounds all efforts toward unequivocal verbal expression" (p. 181). The post-heuristic-inquiry me wonders, are these instinctive impressions connected to the intangibility of the who? Are they a result of our involvement in who-to-who connections? Are we unknowingly sensing and assessing the who? Can we explicitly seek out the who, assessing its potential for both successful teaching and on-going professional evolution? What questions might be asked in the recruitment of teachers to most greatly benefit from what is perceived as instinct?

Finding the Who

Whether in or out of the educational field, there is an expanding interest, it appears, in factors outside of the academic and professional background of individuals, for instance emotional intelligence testing and psychometric evaluation. Goleman writes (2005):

> The rules for work are changing. We're being judged by a new yardstick: not just by how smart we are, or by our training and expertise, but also by how well we handle ourselves and each other… The new measure takes for granted having enough intellectual ability and technical know-how to do our jobs; it focuses instead on personal qualities, such as initiative and empathy, adaptability and persuasiveness.

Without in any way discounting or underestimating the value of academic or professional qualifications, could this interest in the person be connected to a necessary concern for knowing who we are addressing or considering, that is, beyond what they may have done previously, how well they might have done it, and why?

Future research might interest itself in how we attend to the who, for instance in the selection of teacher candidates for teacher training programs, or of teachers to fill positions in schools. What is the current state of affairs? Do we tend to look for people who fit into the pre-established mould, who will pick up from where their predecessors have left off? Do candidates feel the need to prove that they are able to fit into the mould, to quickly be assimilated within existing structures and procedures? Or do we instead leave room for innovation and newness, a space that incites candidates to put forward their best truth, willingly divulging their who and therefore their true vocational-professional inclinations? Research might also focus on teacher induction practices with regard to the who. Are early career teachers melting into the system, without

sufficient consideration for their who, or are they adding to the system in pertinent ways, maintaining the integrity of their who?

The present investigation also shines a light on literacy, with implications that reach beyond this exploration and literacy teaching specifically. Shared reading, writing, common discussions, all were central to reaching into ourselves. Further investigation may continue to look into the role of literacy in uncovering, exploring and fostering the who in a variety of contexts and circumstances, with and beyond teachers.

The Journey of Heuristic Inquiry

Palmer (2007) writes:

> To become a better teacher, I must nurture a sense of self that both does *and* does not depend on the responses of others – and that is a true paradox. To learn that lesson well, I must take a solitary journey into my own nature *and* seek the help of others in seeing myself as I am – another of many paradoxes that abound in the inner terrain. (p. 76)

Having experienced heuristic inquiry as this process of the solitary journey into my own nature through the help of others, Palmer's words deeply resonate with me. How do we foster the who as both an individual and a collective mission? What does this imply? Could research, reflection and practice in education further delve into heuristic inquiry as a means to accomplish the journey of self-study in collaboration?

Heuristic inquiry also answers to the issue of time for the who. Webster (2015) states: "So much attention goes on thinking about the kids' thinking, but we really need to invest in supporting the teacher's thinking. Because if the teachers are learning and growing, their kids will be learning and growing" (p. 45). Thinking about the who, nurturing the who within optimal, thoughtful circumstances requires time. I have so often heard the teachers and school staffs with whom I work complain about the lack of time to think, and I can vouch for that myself. The heuristic inquiry process gave me the freedom to think, pushed me to think and developed me as a thinker. But – and this is vital – it also carved thinking time out for me, time for my who.

Moreover, it prompted serious consideration for timing. The investigation questions within the current study stemmed from a situation that was mine and that pertained to my own identity. Having lived with some form of these questions for so many years, I wonder at having escaped their deliberate exploration for so long. Should uncovering the who, reflecting on the question of who we are, not be a priority before being entrusted with the development of students and their who? Palmer (2007) writes of educating that it is "to guide students on an inner journey" (p.6). What if all pre-service teachers were asked to conduct a heuristic inquiry of their own, with the who in mind, to enable them "to scout out their inner terrain" (Palmer, 2007, p. 6) in order to guide others to do so? What if these future teachers did so not to ready themselves for the development of a professional self, but to enter into truthful communication with their who prior to evolving within the professional context of teaching? What if time for thinking, with the who in mind, were prioritized for both pre-service and in-service teachers? What if developing sound thought on the who were put forth as an essential ability for anyone involved in education, including the student?

From Practice to Theory to Practice

I began this journey in practice, with questions that begged for academic investigation. Through the ensuing inquiry, I was pushed and pulled forward by thought provoking theoretical constructs and processes. Now that the investigation is complete, the journey accomplished, the academic is begging for a return to the practical.

The Toolbox sessions that I enthusiastically delivered as a consultant, and that indirectly launched my doctoral process, seemed revolutionary to me as a model in which there was on-going communication about a given area of focus. I felt I was moving forward in collaboration with teachers and I truly believed I was working to engage them. However, the post-heuristic-inquiry me now realizes that I was addressing a collective composed of individuals, not the individuals partaking in a collaborative opportunity for evolution. The Toolbox sessions were not systematically or intentionally attending to the who. Getting back to Palmer, I was not fulfilling the mission of promoting both individual and collective reflection leading to progress. Among the gains that emerge from the current study, one that proved to be reliant on the two-way influence of the individual and the collective, there is a view of the who of the teacher as central to student success through its collaborative potential. This is another area calling for further exploration.

From practice to theory and back again, inevitably it seems, I went from the Toolbox sessions, to heuristic inquiry, now to School Success Teams. These are voluntary groups, composed of teachers, principals and other staff members from a given school, focused on success for all students, whatever this might be, through professional collaboration. At the board level, in

supporting this endeavour, my new understanding is that we will need to attend to the who wherever it might be, cherishing and nurturing it within the collective reflection.

At the first School Success Team meeting, we, the board curriculum team, projected pictures of our own children onto the screens around the room, pictures of this year's first day of school. We spoke frankly. For some of our children, this first day of school was a day of great enthusiasm and hopefulness, for others a day of unease, anxiety, dejection. We then asked the individuals in the room what they wished for the children in their lives, their own children, this school year. People turned to one another tentatively, at first. Soon after, the discussions took flight, the stories began. There were names and faces in these conversations, memories, laughter, hope and discouragement. It was not so much the personal nature of the discussions that struck me in this, but more so the genuineness I was perceiving within them. When we did move on to speak of school success, it was not as faceless collective entities, nor was it about generic students; I believe it was as individuals coming together to work collaboratively, towards benefitting the individual students composing our classes.

This is a work in progress, of course, but one that shows promise. Collective conversation is interesting, but highlighting the individual within the collective, creating space for the who, can be empowering.

Questions

Until my heuristic journey, I believed my work was to provoke the right answers. Since my journey, I wish to provoke thought towards finding the right questions. Through the new lenses I

have gained, I notice in my daily work that teachers and school staffs are answer-seekers, problem-solvers, ready for action. But where are the questions? What issues are the solutions we are actively proposing meant to address? While at the onset of my journey I had relied on heuristic inquiry to find answers, one of its gifts to me was that it enabled me to truly see the questions, and to realize their value. Indeed, now that it is time to conclude, I find myself still filled with questions, more so than answers. There are questions to myself, questions for further research, questions for universities and teacher-trainers, questions for the various people involved in education, including in-school administrators, board-level directors and personnel, teachers, non-teaching staff members and students. Are these questions what is to be left behind from the idea that grew and grew?

The Next Chapter

I have passed by my who without recognizing it and, as a consequence, even in some of the most rewarding professional moments, I have arched my back against the possibility of being trapped, not in a teacher identity, but in a false identity. (Chapter 9)

There is another story that begs to be written on the wings of such questions, that of the triumph of the secret hidden in plain sight, that of the recognition of the who, first and foremost, in education. Without the *who*, there cannot be the *what*, the *what* of creating, reflecting and innovating; the *what* of evolving; the *what* of teaching and learning. As I put these words to paper, the much-anticipated annual reports by the Fraser Institute have just been released, ranking schools and school boards within various Canadian provinces including Quebec, based on academic results (https://www.fraserinstitute.org/school-performance). And we, schools and

school boards, will scramble to justify our defeat or chant our triumph with regard to these very public numbers. We will dissect the quality of examinations, student behaviours, socio-economic contexts. There will be analysis of gaps in results between boys and girls, and between students with or without special needs and intervention plans. Our speeches to administrators, schools, education committees, parent committees, councils of commissioners, will be full of statements on the what. I think of Buijs (2005), who writes: "the more we insist on standards of performance, be it on the part of the instructors or on the part of students, the less, it seems, we pay attention to the individual circumstances surrounding both the instructor and the student" (p. 339). I read these words differently now than I had when I first crossed them. Buijs highlights that the more we attempt to standardize both teaching and learning, the more we withdraw from an inner sense of purpose or calling. I see in this the statement that the more performance-based we are, the less we can address the person, the who, in all its colour and light, its nuances and inflections. Indeed, following the reports by the Fraser Institute, just as it happens following the publication of graduation rates and provincial examination results, there will be impassioned statements on the what. I will long for the questions on the who, questions that will address how we have considered the who, questions that will ponder how we will foster the who.

I keep hearing that today's student is being prepared for jobs that do not yet exist. How can we then continue to focus on content and constructs, the what that perhaps comforts us in its seeming measurability, when so much depends on the vital who, within us through any circumstance, evolution or revolution, through any representation or aspect of the what? Examination results, marks on report cards, rankings and grades, these are all walls, statements behind which we fail to see that the who is negated by our emphasis on the what, and that the what is crippled by our lack of vision into the who.

Because the story and stories held within these pages belong to eight individuals, whether alone or collectively, I was wary of generalizations as I outlined the various findings, contributions and implications hereby included. I now put forth a plea. It is my hope that the story and stories held within these pages may reinforce the urgency of attending to the who. In the chapter that has yet to be written, education is driven by questions of substance, meaningful questions to foster the who along a life-long commitment that begins before school and extends much beyond.

Last Words

I struggled with last words, with the notion of conclusion in this story. Then, I read Palmer (2004), who writes:

> So if we want to live in the truth, it is not enough to live in the conclusions of the moment. We must find a way to live in the continuing conversation, with its conflicts and complexities, while staying in close touch with our inner teacher. (p. 127)

Contemplating this statement, I understood my reluctance to provide last words, final punctuation. Indeed, these are but a few pages within the imperative, on-going story of the who and the what in education.

Wherever I am, there is my who, to whom it may concern…

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