A Narrative Inquiry into Students' Use of Family Stories to Find Self in the Social Studies Curriculum

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By

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Dedication

In Loving Memory of Wes Hollings (February 8, 1961 – March 25, 2012)

Of all the moments we shared over the years, it is our last conversation that resonates with me most as I struggle to find the words for this dedication. I'll never forget when the principal arrived at my classroom door one afternoon and told me he was there to cover my class while I took an important phone call in the main office. You were the last person I expected on the other end of the line, yet there wasn't anyone else from whom I would have rather heard. You greeted me with a chuckle, clearly proud of the scheme you had hatched to pull me away from my class, and a warm, "What are you doing?" You had sensed from an email sent earlier that day that I was unsure of how to navigate a situation I was in the midst of and, in your gentle, knowing way, you reached out to lend your support. I asked you what I should do, in the same as I had so many times before. You responded without hesitation telling me, "You already know. Go with your heart."

I know in my heart that this work is dedicated to you, Mr. Hollings: my teacher, my colleague, and my dear friend. Thank you for showing me what it truly means to teach; I am forever grateful. As I continue my journey as a teacher, I am guided by two things: your example and my heart.

Abstract

In this narrative inquiry, I explore student connections to personal and family history and how those connections, or lack thereof, shape their understandings of Social Socials content – in regard to how the students attend to history and each other. I believe there is a disconnect between the rationale of Social Studies programs, which advocates for the development of active and engaged citizens, and the way many programs are being delivered. To explore an alternative approach to Social Studies, I invited Grade 9 students and their teachers to share their perspectives about their engagement in a Roots Project which was intended to enrich students' understanding and sense of identity, as individuals, as members of families and communities, and as citizens of the world. Research participants included three grade 9 students in a secondary school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and three collaborating teachers, who happened to be at various stages of their careers: an experienced semi-retired teacher, a beginning teacher, and an education undergraduate student.

In attending to both student and teacher voices, I found that the incorporation of personal and family history into the secondary Social Studies curriculum provided a range of opportunities for student growth in both personal and social realms. It provided students with an opportunity to step back from the formalized, prescribed curriculum and it exposed them to multiple ways of learning and knowing, through personal conversation about subject matter with which they had an organic connection. I found the importance of relationships, and the acknowledgement of family diversity and inclusion of all family forms and perspectives in the classroom, to be central to interweaving personal and family history into Social Studies subject matter.

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I would like to thank my family for their unwavering support. **Mom** and **Dad** you're always there for me no matter what. How blessed am I to know that wherever I go and whatever I do I have two wonderful parents standing behind me. **Grandma** and **Grandpa** you instilled the love of story in me. Not only have we shared our days as grandparents and granddaughter but you also transported me back in time to the days of your youth. The tales of "the farm" and "Bridgeland" mean the world to me. I love you all.

Thank you to the friends and colleagues that shared in this experience and stood by me. You are part of my chosen family, **Karen**; my sister at heart. From the very first moments as my plans began to take shape you embraced this adventure with me. It means so much to me to know that you are always just an email or phone call away. I am not sure what I would do without you. I'll never forget my very first class at the University of Saskatchewan and in part it is because I met you, **Aaron**. There is no friend or colleague I would have rather been on this journey with.

There are many educators who have opened their classrooms and hearts to me and whose advice, wisdom and support continues to motivate me. **Marlene**, **Billi**, **John**, and **Audra**, working alongside you has been truly inspirational. Many of my best gifts as a teacher have been learned from, and nurtured by, you.

And lastly to all the students I have had the honour to learn with, and from, thank you for motivating me to become the best teacher I can be and igniting my passion for education.

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Chapter One: Introduction

A Tale of Two Poppies: Narrative Beginnings

One Remembrance Day I wore two poppies. They were strategically pinned, one slightly overlapping the other, careful not to compromise the structure of the symbolic red felt flowers. The quiet noise they made as they gently rubbed together in response to my movements was a constant reminder of the time of year. At the same time they seemed to elicit in me a heightened awareness of the multiplicity of emotions I was experiencing. I know that wearing two poppies is not the norm and I deeply appreciate the demonstration of solidarity that the single poppy affords. In fact, until this occasion, I proudly commemorated Remembrance Day in the traditional single poppy fashion, but in November of 2010 things were different. I had recently felt a very personal loss of two special veterans. Both had served in World War II, and I adored both of these men as great-uncles. Uncle Tom and Uncle Ossie live on through the stories our family and friends tell. At social gatherings, discussions that initially revolve around current events and updates, without fail, give way to reminiscing. Stories are told and retold, emphasis and focal points of the plotlines shifting depending on the venue and audience. The memories of these two men are safely tucked in my heart and, while I am confident in my curator skills, I wanted to display these affections outwardly in a tangible way if only this one time. Thus I dedicated a poppy, and a place on my lapel that mimicked the space in my heart, to each of them.

As a Social Studies teacher with two poppies purposefully pinned to my lapel I felt an unparalleled understanding of significance and connection to the men and events that brought us to this place. I could not help but wonder about the relationships my students have with people and events of the past. In what ways does their awareness, or lack thereof, shape the way in which they attend to history and each other? This narrative inquiry explores the impact of the

incorporation of personal and family history into secondary Social Studies classrooms from the perspectives of both students and teachers.

In many ways, my Great Uncle Tom was a summer uncle. The combination of these two words alone makes me smile. Every summer we visited Uncle Tom and Auntie Ella at their beautiful home on Shuswap Lake. Thoughts of my uncle cannot be separated from the sounds of waves crashing against the shore or popsicles making a sticky mess of tanned, bare arms and legs. My mom always says that Uncle Tom was among the very first visitors to the hospital when both my brother and I were born, sneaking in past nurses and dodging attendants to catch a glimpse of the new additions to the family.

As a child I suppose I wasn't aware that these "old people" had rich and complex lives before I came along. One summer, during a garage sale at the lake house, my uncle gave my brother a gun plate off of the HCMS Tecumseh, one of the ships he had served on. I began to understand that my uncle had been in the Navy and later learned that he was on convoy duty in the North Sea during World War II. This made sense; after all there were beautiful paintings of ships on the walls in their home. I remember the way my parents responded to the gesture of the gun plate, and it signaled to me that this was something very significant. Perhaps because I wasn't interested at the time or maybe because it just never came up, many years passed before tales of Uncle Tom's past were shared. While I have vivid memories of the last afternoon I spent with my Uncle as he narrated the details of his early years, I now deeply regret having not penned a few of the particulars from the stories he shared. His voice, soft and tired and needing to stop frequently for breaks, transported me to another lifetime. I walked hand in hand with him in a world I had never seen. Uncle Tom made the history that I love come alive and reminded

me that "everybody has a story and everybody wants to tell their story in order to connect" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 73).

As is customary in many schools on Remembrance Day, the wreath laying responsibilities fall to the newest additions to the staff. Coincidently, in November of 2010, I found myself three months into a new position. Before the assembly, while gathered with my Grade 12 class in the comforts of our classroom, I offered the standard reminders to the students about the respect that ought to be granted to those participating in the service as well as about the overall solemnness of the occasion. While I trusted the judgment of each of my students this conversation was expected; a four minutes tops formality. As the standards and procedures spiel drew to a close, I was probed about my two poppies. I choked back emotion and began to speak of my uncles.

I had brought a selection of photos and memorabilia, recently received in the mail from my treasured Auntie Ella, to share with my students in hopes of contextualizing the experience for them. I seize any opportunity to share the stories of my uncles and in doing so encourage students to attend to their own family history. As I cautiously handed over the pieces, tucked safely in their plastic casings, I was reminded of the first time I had seen the photo of Uncle Tom, handsomely pictured in his Navy uniform some seventy years ago. My aunt had directed me to the closet in her bedroom. "The top shelf on the right," she had called from the kitchen of her warm, inviting condo. Alone in the closet I tightly clutched the brass frame that held the photo. Unable to move, I stood perfectly still and met the eyes distinctly known to me yet captured within a context I will never fully comprehend. I struggled to come to terms with the striking juxtaposition of the foreign and the familiar – the reality of war that shadowed the photo and ultimately my uncle's young life compared to the times of relative peace we enjoyed together in

recent years, the striking display of youth that had since been concealed by slowed movements and wrinkled skin. I was overwhelmed with questions that I yearned to ask the man in the photo. He had enlisted on his own volition – would I have done the same?

I smiled at the intense gazes of my students as they took in the photo for the first time, not saying a word. Their eyes judiciously moved across the photograph, focusing on the insignia on Uncle Tom's shoulder and the letters embroidered on his hat, moving it closer to their eyes as the examination intensified. I felt compelled to break the silence to point out the watch on his wrist. It may well have simply been part of his uniform, perhaps standard issue, but it consistently catches my attention every time I glance at the photo. The watch had been with my uncle the whole time; it chronicled his entire adventure and perhaps even held the answers to the burning questions I had. I often wonder where the watch is now. Does it continue to keep time? Would the watch look any different 70 years later, because my beloved uncle most certainly did. That which keeps the time seems timeless itself when compared to the human faces that routinely look upon it. The wearer looks a little different after each experience; a little older as the setting of the sun signals the end of another day, a little more tranquil upon accepting that the faithful mechanism in the watch will neither slow down nor speed up regardless of the wearer's desires. Small, subtle, barely there changes that accumulate into seasons, years, and lifetimes.

I couldn't help but wonder if my own initial reaction, mesmerized as I stood alone in my aunt's closet that past summer, was being mirrored in the faces of my students. I quickly

accepted that I would never know and instead took delight in the inquisitive expressions and questions of my students. I was pleasantly surprised; despite not having a direct familial tie to the man in the photograph, they were equally captivated. My attempts to rationalize, to comprehend why they were responding with such empathetic eyes and ears, were in vain. For whatever reason, there seemed to be a connection. It was the kind of genuine connection that teachers are continually striving to craft yet it often falls just short of our grasp. In those fleeting moments I was awake to the tides of humanity that continued to pull us closer. Tides that pulled us out into a realm of unity and togetherness as our individual concerns and desires faded into the landscape of the distant shoreline. I was proud to engage in a dialogue about my beloved uncles with my students who were enchanted by the ensuing conversations about the past. Together we were wondering, imagining and experiencing – a moment I wanted to savor. I wished that the tides would stay out forever.

The stories these men left behind echoed through the classroom as we readied for the assembly. Offering final reminders, straightening the last of the poppies and leaving my class with my intern, I excused myself to perform my duties as advisor to the Students' Union and receive instructions as we prepared for the assembly in the gym. I glanced up to the balcony as my class took their seats hoping they were still holding, and reflecting on, the thoughts and feelings from our recent conversations. When I laid my wreath on behalf of the staff at Wm. E. Composite High School I became distinctly aware of the two poppies I was wearing and while I was very much alone, standing in front of an audience that easily exceeded one thousand people, I did not feel as such. I had my uncles with me on my lapel and my students looking down from the balcony. In that moment we were all woven together – past, present and future.

As I caught myself repeatedly glancing up at my grade twelve students during the ceremony, squished into the balcony of the gym, I couldn't help but wonder if they enjoyed a sense of identity rooted in rich family history such as I did. I treasure the stories shared around the dinner table with parents, grandparents, and great-aunts and uncles that linger into the evening long after the last dishes have been cleared and coffee refills grow cold. Everyone draws in close to flip through the old photos or watch the slides that inevitably appear during such gatherings. I have often reminisced about those moments I shared with my students in the gym. I believe that with each year that passes students are becoming more and more disconnected from the traditions and family tales whose reverberations have profoundly influenced their lives regardless of whether or not they are conscious of these dynamics.

What is Social Studies? A Curricular Exploration

Where, between the fragmented, detached pieces of history students are expected to learn in Social Studies, have we provided them an outlet to explore personal connections to the curriculum? John Dewey (1938) wrote, "In a word, we live from birth to death in a world of persons and things which in large measure is what it is because of what has been done and transmitted from previous human activities" (p. 39). What richness and possibility is embedded in that notion! Imagine a curriculum that enables students to explore the personal and relational implications of our ever evolving society. A humanistic exploration that builds bridges to connect with the past by providing a chance for students to trace their ancestry while delving into the social, political and economic realities of days gone by – culminating in a holistic and enduring understanding. However, educators typically attend to these details through a different lens; facts and dates of events that occurred many years ago offer little to spark, let alone ignite, young minds.

As we compartmentalize knowledge we distance ourselves from the content. "When we distance ourselves from something it becomes an object; when it becomes an object it no longer has life; when it is lifeless it cannot touch or transform us" (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011, p. 12). This is a dangerous cycle to fall victim to. It contributes to the fragmentation process and "the effects of the fragmentation of our communities show up [with] large portions of the population who remain disengaged" (Block, 2008, pp. 2-3). The first line of the Social Studies Program of Studies developed by Alberta Education (2007) reads, "Social Studies provides opportunities for students to develop the attitudes, skills and knowledge that will enable them to become engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens" (p. 1). If the goal of Social Studies is to truly nurture these qualities then one has to question the ability of the current approach to fulfill the curriculum mandate.

Themes such as 'me,' 'my family,' and 'my community' are emphasized as focal points in the elementary years as students learn to navigate the world around them. While these themes are dominant in early education, they are all but absent as children transition into teenagers. For example, in the Alberta Grade 12 Social Studies course entitled *Perspectives on Ideology*, students are required to identify Edmund Burke, among other economic founding fathers, as the central figure associated with Classical Conservatism and are required to know what his foundational beliefs were. Not only is this impractical for the 21st century learner but how does it aid in the development and enhancement of the skill set that our students require to negotiate modern challenges? Historical instructional approaches such as rote memorization are beginning to be exchanged for more student centered methods such as inquiry in which students are encouraged to form an understanding for themselves. Access to information is not the challenge; developing constructive habits of mind is. Analytical skills, which include acknowledgement of

cause and effect relationships alongside personal and social consequence, are perhaps more pertinent. While I am fairly certain that Edmund Burke was far from the minds of my students that November afternoon, I wondered what message the curriculum and we who teach it are sending to our students about priorities. Yes, Burke contributed to the development of economic systems, and that is notable, but how do his ideas influence us today? What might happen if we were to adopt his notion of classical conservatism? The concept has little meaning for the students unless they are able to situate it in a context which has personal and social relevance. Is it not crucial to connect the core foundations of self, family, and community with all social studies concepts when students are poised on the brink of adulthood ready to embark on adventures of their own making?

Life in a secondary Social Studies classroom can be a conflicting space. While there are moments when students are able to acknowledge the application that certain topics have to their lives, more often than not tangible connections evade them. Students' lack of connection has an adverse effect on their feelings toward, and willingness to engage with, the content. Noddings (2006) hypothesizes how students might respond if questioned about the curriculum they study in schools: "Suppose … a high school teacher were to ask her students: 'How many of you would study this topic (or do this work) if I just left it up to you?'" (p. 11). As a secondary high school Social Studies teacher myself, I can confirm that many students do grapple with relevancy when it comes to subject matter. They find the topics are not practical for their daily lives and they express frustration by questioning why they need to learn about various topics, while interjecting exasperated sighs for emphasis. Without a vested interest in the subject matter, many adopt the mindset that it is merely a hoop to be jumped through en route to graduation. The required knowledge is simply temporarily stored and then discarded post assessment,

making room for what the students deem to be more important matters. Eisner (2009) warns that "an unexamined belief in curriculum as in other domains of human activity can easily become dogma which in fact may hinder the very functions the concept was originally designed to serve" (p. 107). Perhaps it is time to ask ourselves why we are we teaching this particular content in this particular manner. Because "the tendency among some teachers is to regard discussion of the rationale for a subject as a rather abstract and irrelevant exercise" (Rowland & Case, 2008, p. 14) a space opens up to allow for the emergence of a strong "grand narrative" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that casts an unfavorable light upon the subject. Many students, as well as many of their parents who have come before, subscribe to this narrative that depicts Social Studies as boring, useless, disjointed bits of facts and dates. As teachers within the larger educational community, this can lead us down a dangerous path because "when we are unclear about the ultimate reason for doing what we do [we instead] teach a topic merely for the sake of covering it" (Rowland & Case, 2008, p. 14). Unfortunately, in the absence of examined purpose, we may fail to make any personal or social connections to the lives of our students and, thus, we become complicit in perpetuating the grand narrative.

John Willinsky (2009) critiques an outdated anthology intended to complement the British Columbia English curriculum by writing, "Not that its selectivity was representative then, let alone now, of the contemporary Canadian landscape of these students' lives or the teachers for that matter" (p. 100). This exact statement could be made in reference to much of the secondary Social Studies curriculum. Again, this lack of representation accentuates the growing distance between student and content, further sacrificing the opportunity for transformative learning. Transformative learning transpires when students formulate meaningful connections with content and experience it in a way that has a profound and lasting impact on their

understanding. For this to occur an organic connection is required; one that cannot be forced through detached and fragmented pieces of information such as those presented in many textbooks produced to guide Social Studies courses.

When genuine or transformative learning occurs, students are engaged in building social capital. Social capital "refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them … networks [that] have value" (Putnam, 2000, p. 19). Engaging students in exploring how "a sense of connectedness and accountability associated with social capital" (Chadwick, 2004, p. 4) can be developed among citizens and how networks of value can be created comprise core foundations of Social Studies programs. A particular type of social capital, "bridging social capital," as described by Putnam (2000), results from "networks [that] are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages" (p. 22). Networks such as the civil rights movement and various youth organizations exemplify relationships which are bridged through social capital. The Saskatchewan Social Studies Curriculum (2009) states that "the ultimate aim is for students [to] have a sense of themselves as active participants and citizens in an inclusive, culturally diverse, interdependent world" (p. 6). What is critical to keep in mind that "what really matters from the point of view of social capital and civic engagement is not merely nominal membership, but active and involved membership" (Putnam, 2000, p. 58). How can a unit within the program of studies be focused on the creation of "bridging social capital" through community-oriented or local thinking while encouraging students to consider "citizenship as the willingness to build community" (Block, 2008, p. 65)? How can we help students to develop an understanding of our unique individual placements as connected to others on the societal landscape? How can we develop, within each unit of study, a facility for empathetic thought – for students to see themselves in relationship with others? We

have the possibility to “choose depth over speed and relatedness over scale” (Block, 2008, p. 75) and perhaps in doing so nurture engaged, active, informed, and responsible citizens. Noddings (2006) argues that “possibly no goal of education is more important – or more neglected – than self-understanding” (p. 10). This includes opening up spaces for students to investigate their personal, family, and local circumstances that shape their identity and subsequent ways of being in the world.

Your First Teachers: Family Stories

Just as Uncle Tom was a summer uncle I could probably say Uncle Ossie was a winter uncle; a skating uncle to be exact because my fondest memories of him happened to take place on ice. I remember sitting at my Aunt and Uncle’s kitchen table one afternoon when my Uncle brought out a small box and put in on the table. Inside were photos, coins, little slips of paper that, taken together, recounted my Uncle Ossie’s life from 1942-1946 as Signalman O.L. Overland M-104682. Later in his life he decided to pen his own select memoirs from his years of service in the infantry and everyone in the family quickly requested their own copy. I often read passages from my Uncle Ossie’s memoir aloud to my students, especially his recollection of the declaration of war and his inability to recognize his youngest sister upon return; a consequence of the many years spent away from home. Of his homecoming he wrote,

> I picked up all of my gear and stepped down onto the platform. It was a very subdued reunion, big smiles, hugs, kisses and teary eyes. I said, “Where is Marj?” My mother

> said, “Right behind you.” She had grown so much I did not even know her. I had left Calgary on a cold winter night and now three years and five months later I was back on a cold winter night. Off we went to my parents for tea. My war was finally over. (Oswald Overland, personal communication, November 2003)

The experience of reading pieces of Uncle Ossie’s memoir aloud does not compare to observing timelines in a textbook because with these stories we see a real man and we feel how he has changed, endured, and grown because of war. He closes his memoir by writing, "My war was finally over.” The use of the word “my” is especially significant. While thousands experienced the life of a soldier, each story is unique; each soldier has his/her own story to tell.

An old black and white photograph with a bent corner and a water stain may just be the key that unlocks hidden meaning for students because “everyone in the community is a teacher. It is not me, all powerful teacher, it is us” (Epstein & Oyler, 2008, p. 410). Included in the “us” are those who have forged the trail ahead and whose footprints are slowly succumbing to the elements, silently taking with them invaluable wisdom and knowledge. “We tend to think that wisdom doesn’t exist in the local, we believe wisdom exists outside of ourselves and our families and our communities and we have to bring experts in” (Cameron, 2012) There seems to be a pervasive hesitance by young and old alike to accept the opinions of those who are unable to quantify their position or are not denoted as an expert. As a result we may not listen as closely as we might to the ones who were there, who lived it, and who have stories to share and lessons to teach. Instead we too often rely on curriculum documents and textbooks that are “written for faceless people in a homogeneous realm” (Aoki, 2004, p. 207) while our students are anything but faceless or homogeneous. The students’ connections to the generalized stories they hear are typically limited at best. Yet, somehow “family stories seem to persist in importance even when

people think of themselves individually, without regard to their familial roles. The particular human chain we're part of is central to our individual identity" (Stone, in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 113). Perhaps this is because "our house is our corner of the world… it is our first universe" (Bachelard, in Noddings, 2006, p. 64). Because of this it is crucial that we bring the learning home and, in doing so, create deep meaning. By assisting students in the investigation into their personal and family history, we foster their sense of connectedness to social studies curriculum and we enrich their understanding and sense of identity, as individuals, as members of families and communities, and as citizens of the world.

Building the Bridge: Justification

When speaking of a man who was dedicated to preserving his ancestral history, Severn Cullis Suzuki (2007) wrote, "I try to fathom how his awareness of his ancestry affects his sense of who he is, what his role is in the continuum of his own history and the history of his people, and what he's here to do" (p. 37). With this ancestral awareness comes a sense of connection; strong roots that enable survival in punishing winds while breeding resiliency and that encourage one to flourish in gentle winds while seeding confidence and security. The pursuit to know and understand my family history, and consequently how that positioned me in the world, in part led me to become a secondary Social Studies teacher. As I began to pursue this career, my aunts and uncles became even more committed to affirming my roots; sharing more and more stories and experiences with me as I soaked them up like a sponge – always wanting more. I am grateful for this grounding and the frame of reference this understanding provides. I feel that working to create such a grounding for youth through the social studies curriculum has the potential to enrich their sense of identity as they navigate their place in society. Just as I did with the photograph of my Uncle Tom, I see possibility in facilitating for students "the experience of

finding a stranger in place of a familiar figure and of starting again to try to understand" (Bateson, 2000, p. 43). Worlds of imagination and possibility opened with that photograph that I would have never stumbled upon otherwise. The encounter with the photograph, and subsequently with my students before the Remembrance Day service, profoundly changed what I was awake to during interactions with my students. I felt a renewed commitment to truly hear what they were saying both through words and actions.

I believe the incorporation of personal and family history into the secondary Social Studies curriculum provides a range of opportunities for student growth in both personal and social realms. It provides students with an opportunity to step back from the formalized, prescribed curriculum, and it exposes them to multiple ways of learning and knowing; in this case through personal conversation about subject matter with which they have an organic connection. It poses a challenge to students because "meaningful conversations depend on our willingness to forget about neat thoughts, clear categories, narrow roles" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 37) which run counter to facts, dates, and timelines. It also provides an opportunity to listen to the voices who were there before our own: "Because the world has so greatly changed … we cannot re-create that world for our own children and probably would not want to. No one today can walk the same mile as a parent or a mentor, for the landscape has altered" (Bateson, 2000, p. 11). Because of this the sharing of stories is invaluable; it is through story that we remember and connect.

Story enables a multiplicity of understandings and interpretations because there is no such thing as a neutral audience or a single universal understanding. Even as the listener situates her or himself alongside the story teller, s/he brings with her/him a context of her/his own, influenced by numerous factors from previous experiences that blend together for a unique

hearing (Olson, 1995, p. 120). Experience and story are inseparable because "experience is the stories people live. People live stories, and in the telling of these stories, reaffirm them, modify them, and create new ones" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. xxvi). As we listen to the stories of others, we embark on an introspective journey that invites us to reexamine our own experiences. Through evoking memories, the stories call us to consider past events with a renewed perspective and perhaps draw new conclusions. There is a fluidity to story that creates room for the shifting and shaping of perspective as listeners and tellers negotiate their mutual and individual understandings. It is this facet of story that provides space for analysis, reflection, validation, and ultimately growth because "we no longer accept what is given but awaken to wonder how it came to be and what other may be possible" (Olson, 1995 p. 131).

There is a natural draw to story when it comes to understanding and passing knowledge on; it is in a way an assurance that certain pieces of information are preserved. Many have heard members of older generations recount tales of walking uphill to school both ways as they combated a plethora of unpleasant variables. While this has become accepted as a humorously common folklore it often serves as a springboard as the narrator goes on to describe select memories of their past. Many children begin to learn about values and human characteristics through tales spun by family and friends as they sit on knees or ready for bed. For me, I learned a great deal about life from sitting at the kitchen table.

"When society is fluid, young and old alike need to improvise and to teach each other" (Bateson, 2000, p. 31). During times of change we all are able to become teachers for one another. Although teenagers are known for being egocentric thinkers that prioritize immediate needs within their personal sphere of influence, Social Studies has the potential to begin to connect and move students beyond their own experiences. Through fostering a sense of empathy

and community, teachers and students can come to see the untapped potential for their prescribed roles to be flexible and interchangeable. Meaningful teaching in a rapidly changing world can be accomplished through sharing in multigenerational conversations. “These times are calling us toward a change in consciousness – a comprehensive change in how we understand ourselves – specifically, a shift in our worldview from separation consciousness to relational consciousness” (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011, p. 4). Relational consciousness bridges the gaps created by disconnect and fragmentation. Rather than seeing ourselves as independent actors delivering monologues on the societal stage it is in our best interest to welcome and embrace the contributions of fellow actors. In doing so we are better equipped to provide the audience with a holistic understanding and also limit the gaps in the plotline that are a natural consequence of silenced voices and omitted perspectives.

Engaging in genuine conversations with one another – conversations that are intergenerational, conversations that work towards building community ethos, and conversations that are appreciated – is a way to begin to authentically create relational consciousness. As I sat in the kitchen with my Uncle Ossie, Aunt Shirley, my brother Mike, and my parents that afternoon with the box of mementoes sitting in the middle of the table, it was almost as if we had stumbled upon the secrets of time travel. We visited the beaches of France and the fields of Holland, among other places I have only dreamed of travelling to, all without straying from the confines of the small kitchen in Calgary. Holding the coins and photos in my hands I lost track of the decades that separated me from the headlines my Uncle had lived years ago. This is perhaps as close as I will ever come to being there on September 3, 1939 when war was declared on Germany, or enduring a voyage across the ocean, or falling asleep to the sounds of gunfire. I cannot help but wonder what emotions were elicited in the opening of that box for my Uncle.

There is no question that he was with us in the kitchen in a physical sense, but where was he really? Boundaries of time and place ceased to exist as we moved freely backward and forward in time, inward and outward between our own thoughts and emotions and the conversation of our family, and from place to place to place. As he paralleled the well known historical events with his own personal stories, Uncle Ossie forged meaningful and lasting connections for me to a history that took me from the kitchen, to the battlefield, and ultimately followed me to the classroom.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu (in Wheatley & Frieze, 2011) said, “We belong in a bundle of life. We say ‘a person is a person through other people.’ It is not ‘I think therefore I am’ [but rather] ‘I am human because I belong.’ I participate. I share” (p. 74). This definition of humanity is comforting in such a way that it is achievable for all regardless of time, place, and circumstance. It is essentially a question of priority. As silence blanketed the gymnasium that day in November I looked forward to the cenotaph laden with wreaths in front of me and imagined what my uncles might have felt during their brave expeditions. Then I looked up to the balcony and wondered what the future would hold for my students.

Even as we construct our own meanings and understandings that aid in defining us as individuals we cannot discount the role played by those who surround us: “We author our lives in concert with others. No life is a solo performance” (Olson, 1995, p. 126). The scientific claim that with every action there is an equal and opposite reaction can also be aptly applied to human interactions. Yet, to further complicate the equation, we are also still responding to the actions and reactions of the past. When this concept is pushed aside in the name of individualism, it can result in many of the challenges of disconnection and fragmentation described above. However, it is never too late to embark on a journey of reconciliation and

reconnection and in doing so bridge together people and generations living together in community. Peter Block (2008) identifies “youth as a unifying force in the community” (p. 165). What a wonderful prospect educators have to begin to cultivate social capital and relational consciousness so that students may not only hear the contribution they are making to the symphony but also appreciate the beautiful music they are creating in concert with others.

Making the Connection: Research Design

This narrative inquiry took place alongside the Community Education Cohort at Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute in Saskatoon, SK. The Community Education Cohort is an integrated humanities program unique to Peggy McKercher that combines Social Studies 9, English Language Arts 9, and Arts Education 9 with an emphasis on social justice. This program effectively uses the city as their classroom; students engage in learning opportunities all around Saskatoon gathering a plethora of experiences and information from many people, places, and ideas. This classroom was an ideal site for my research because of the level of student engagement with the community and because of the regular opportunity students are afforded for dialogue with a diverse group of multigenerational people. Because the students are encouraged to look beyond the confines of the classroom walls they are open to a less typical approach to subject matter and to a concept of learning that highlights conversation and personal focus.

During this research I acted as a guest teacher in a team teaching environment from September to December of 2012. Our team consisted of a full time teacher, a student teacher, and the founder of the program, a recently retired experienced educator who provided continued guidance to the team. As I detail in Chapter 2, I began my research by discussing with the students what their current feelings were toward Social Studies and where they saw themselves and their families fitting into the bigger curricular picture. This provided me with insight into

how students had been taught in the past and what experiences they were bringing into the work we were going to be doing together.

Following this initial exploration, I introduced the students to family history and inquired into how much students knew about their own family and/or local positions. Through the use of children's and youth literature with varying personal and familial focal points, inquiry into personal artifacts, conversations with family and/or community members, and independent research, we pursued an exploration of the students' roots. Together we discussed the links their investigations may have created for them to the outcomes and content in the program of studies.

The whole class was part of the teaching process and exploration into local and family history; however, I invited three students, Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan, to be research participants. While narrative inquiry does not attempt to be representative, I selected three students whose stories of experience offered diverse contributions to the research field text and broader considerations for analysis and interpretation. These students were not intended to provide a generalized understanding in response to the research puzzle but rather three distinct and particular accounts. My field text, then, gathered through my relations with teacher and student participants, is comprised of a compilation of daily plans and teaching materials, artifacts such as photographs, emails, and communications; field notes of daily experiences and interactions, transcriptions of recorded conversations with research participants, and the students' products and assignments.

Story for Story: Methodology

The methodology for my exploration into the impact of the incorporation of personal and family history into secondary Social Studies classrooms was narrative inquiry. The depth and complexity of this issue was well captured by this research methodology for "narrative inquiry is

stories lived and told" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20), the very heart of this investigation. My research was guided by the notion that "what ought to be interesting… is the unfolding of a lived life rather than the confirmation such a chronicle provides for some theory" (Ludwig, in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 12). Narrative inquiry invited the encapsulation and interpretation of emotive discoveries that arose from sharing and being in relation with one another. The nature of this research required a methodology that focused on experience, and did so narratively. Clandinin & Connelly (2000) stated that "narrative is both the phenomenon and the method of the social sciences" (p. 18). Throughout my research, I gathered stories in narrative ways, staying in conversation with my participants and keeping their stories contextualized and particular while I explored details of interest in my analysis and interpretation. I collected narratives, chronicled them narratively, and came to understand them in narrative ways. My exploration was a "living inquiry" because I "participat[ed]' in classroom life as it unfold[ed]" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 484).

As a researcher alongside the student participants we existed within the "three dimensional narrative inquiry space" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50,) that is guided simultaneously by temporality, social and personal considerations, and place. There was movement in four directions: inward, outward, backward and forward. Participants and I were moved to look inward as we reflected on moments spent and shared with family and friends. Such a process initiated a contemplative journey, beckoning us to question and to inquire into our current understandings and subsequent placement on the local landscape. Together we moved outward to the larger societal surroundings observing, experiencing, and discussing differences and similarities in our responses, interpretations and interactions as we engaged with the social studies curriculum together. Moving from the present time and place of our shared

classroom, we ventured backward into the past to earlier lived experiences, our own and others in our families and communities, and to the places where those experiences were lived out. As we considered how these personal, family, and community stories connected us with the social studies curriculum and its outcomes, we imagined possibilities for future social studies curriculum and instruction that will create a sense of social studies as a living curriculum.

As a teacher I am conscious that I entered the classroom, the site of this research, with a certain degree of power and authority. While I can do little to control the socially constructed tensions that are attached to the title of "teacher," I did dissipate the power a teacher typically holds as I did not grade the students on the work they completed during our time together. I believe this consideration invited more open and honest conversation and aided in the development of community among the students and me. Because the nature of this work was relational, I strove to cultivate a high degree of trust with my participants through personal and practical considerations such as seeking their input, acknowledging their perspectives, and attending to individual concerns that arose. Participants were provided with transcripts of recorded conversations to read, edit and approve.

I was also conscious of the matter of reciprocity and what students gained from participating in this research. Through this project I invited student voice as the students engaged in conversations with me about issues regarding curriculum. I created a safe place for expression and I honored and respected students' opinions as we explored how they felt they were impacted by Social Studies content. During our conversations and our time spent together in community with one another, I conveyed my genuine feelings of care and concern and I was present in the lives of the participants in a significant way.

Moving Forward

Throughout this research, participants and I were engaged in a process of "living and telling, reliving and retelling" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). Together we lived out the curriculum, in the Roots project, and I listened to student and teacher participants tell me their stories of their unfolding experiences. As I analyzed the shifts and impacts that their experiences had on them as individuals and on their positioning within the community, I foregrounded in this research text how students' connection to the social studies curriculum can be different when they are connected to the content through personal and family stories. In Chapter 2, I introduce the student and teacher research participants and I explain in detail our research process. I also describe the Roots project the students completed. In Chapter 3, I focus in on specific individual elements of family that arose from the student research participants' experiences. In Chapter 4, I examine the implications for teaching Social Studies that emerge from my research findings, including an exploration of schooling and education, the incorporation of narrative ways of knowing and learning into classroom practice, and the potential for the development of more authentic relationships.

This has been an exciting journey. It provided an opportunity to dedicate a concentrated effort to combining two of my passions: family stories and teaching Social Studies. I moved forward full of questions, hesitations and anticipation. I looked forward to the new relationships and understandings that awaited me. Wonders abounded as to what I may discover. In Chapter 5, informed by our inquiry, I imagined a reliving of the teaching and learning of social studies, inviting others to attend to new possibilities and join in alternative ways of being within the implementation of curriculum.

Chapter Two: Research Process and Design

Looking at Social Studies From Two Sides: As Student and As Teacher

It never really occurred to me in high school that not everyone loved Social Studies. Social Studies was the highlight of my day; as I waited my way through math or science the class just could not come fast enough. There was never a dull moment as Mr. Hollings moderated debates, encouraged us to comment on current events, and challenged our thinking and opinions daily as we worked our way through the curriculum together. Class was always over too soon, leaving my peers and I lingering about, binders and textbooks cradled in our arms, not wanting to say goodbye until tomorrow. Eventually when we did cross the threshold of the classroom, our conversations continued down the empty hallways, lapsing briefly as we'd fumble with combination locks, before we quickly resumed them. Debates never seemed resolved and questions began formulating for the next class before we had left the building.

One day in particular stands out in my mind. We were slightly more excitable than usual as it was '80s day and side pony tales and neon colours posed a fairly significant challenge to our concentration abilities. There was a knock at the classroom door and Mr. Hollings permanent smile grew just a little wider; when he opened the door in walked Ralph Klein, the then Premier of Alberta. They shook hands and greeted each other by first name. Mr. Klein then took a seat on Mr. Hollings stool at the front of the classroom and began speaking to us about his job and the issues of the day before opening the conversation up to questions. I remember Mr. Hollings later telling us just how close he came to arranging a visit from the Prime Minister…

Even now I can vividly remember Mr. Hollings classroom, although, to be fair, few things changed over the years. The smell of coffee wafting from the urn in the corner atop a desk with extra mugs nestled below, plants in various stages of the life cycle cascading from

macramé holders, the VCR propped up on the old brown filing cabinet for a daily dose of pre-recorded news, and Curious George, balanced on his strategically placed tightrope, carefully riding his unicycle between the two florescent lights peering down over the shoulders of busy students. I loved everything about Social Studies: the class, the room, the man who taught me. What was not to love?

A few years later, when I began to teach high school Social Studies I noticed that my students often did not share my passion for the subject. In many ways it felt like they came to me disheartened and waving a white flag. It seemed regardless of my energy they had already made up their minds: Social Studies had nothing to offer them, rather it was simply a hoop that they were expected to jump through if they wanted to attain the high school diploma at the end of the obstacle course. Sullen and disengaged, for many students it was a simple mechanical act – just get it done and jump through the hoop. How could fragmented knowledge of the past, often presented in a celebratory context that highlighted the accomplishments of old dead guys, enrich their lives? In what way would this information contribute to their day to day activities outside of the classroom? Outside of school? Students struggled to find something relevant to hold on to. After speaking with many high school students in my first years of teaching, I came to the realization that they felt Social Studies, holistically, including topics, related content, and delivery style, was boring and irrelevant. I struggled to understand their feelings. Why didn't they love listening to the interpretations of events presented by their peers and feel eager to join in the conversation? How could they not love wondering what it would have been like to be there, standing in someone else's shoes? How could they not love to be challenged to stand up and be heard? To decode historical events and attempt to identify the present day reverberations? To passionately debate, and sometimes argue, about what was happening around them? To help

them understand they have an important place in the bigger picture and that the world is not just impartially spinning around them?

Looking at Social Studies Through the Lens of Researcher

As with many of life's greatest treasures, I stumbled upon the welcoming and inspiring academic community at Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute by sheer coincidence. One morning I received a dispatch call from the school board that was clearly meant for another substitute teacher. The recorded message referenced the intended teacher's name and noted that the day would unfold as per their earlier conversation. Knowing that mistakes happen, and recognizing that there is need for flexibility in the world of substitute teaching, I accepted the dispatch; perhaps curiosity got the best of me. Entering Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute, I found the secretaries warm and friendly. While the principal walked me to Helen's[1] classroom, the teacher for whom I was to be the substitute that day, we exchanged small talk with the students in the halls and he expressed genuine interest in my educational experiences. During my time in Helen's classroom, I was so taken with the culture and nature of the learning going on, I left a note asking if it would be possible to meet her one day. Helen promptly responded with an invitation to spend time with her and her students in the classroom. From there a friendship and the foundations for a wonderful working relationship were formed. When it came time the following year to select a school and program for my research site, and to consider what teacher and student research participants I may want to engage in an inquiry with, there was no doubt in my mind where my research would be best situated.

Students in the Community Education cohort are Grade 9 students who self-select into the integrated program that combines Social Studies 9, English Language Arts 9, and Arts

[1] Pseudonyms have been used to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of students and teachers. Actual names have been used for my family members.

Education 9 through an emphasis on culture and social justice. Unlike the typical semestered high school classes, the students are together all afternoon for the entire year. This enables them time to create a stronger bond as a group and provides more flexibility for excursions and related learning experiences. I joined the teaching team as a researcher during a transition year that saw Jeffrey begin his teaching career under the mentorship of the newly retired Helen. Sarah, a full time intern, was also a valued member of the teaching team. Together the four of us worked with a group of 30 students who were in the process of transitioning to high school, having come to Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute from a number of different elementary schools.

During my research at Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute, I was introduced to the students as Lindsey, a teacher and researcher who would be joining the class for a few weeks. Students in the program are on a first name basis with the teaching team and I was thrilled with the more informal situation. Rather than desks, students sit on couches arranged in a circle around the perimeter of the room. As we sat together as a class one afternoon, I explained to students what had brought me to their classroom, the wonders that formed my research puzzle, and I offered them the opportunity to pose any questions to me they may have. I emphasized that I was looking for student perspectives about Social Studies and that I was hoping they would help me to determine how we, as a team of students and teachers, could re-imagine Social Studies, transforming it into an enjoyable, relatable course that was valued by all. I invited students wishing to volunteer to be research participants in my inquiry to take the parent information letter and form from the top of the filing cabinet home at the end of the day and to consider it with their parent/s. While narrative inquiry does not attempt to be representative, I selected three students whose stories of experience I believed would offer diverse contributions to the research field text and potentially evoke broader considerations for analysis and

interpretation. Diversity was to be captured through such factors as the students' family or community demographics, their cultural background, or their citizenship status. These students were not intended to provide a generalized understanding but rather three distinct and particular accounts. Following my determined criteria, and not knowing the students in any meaningful way, I invited three volunteers, one male and two females, to be research participants. I selected individuals who appeared to be committed to speaking openly and candidly to me about their experiences with, and understanding of, Social Studies.

Meet the Teacher Research Participants

Jeffrey

During this research, I had the opportunity to collaborate with three teacher participants. It was Jeffrey's classroom that I was welcomed into in September. Jeffrey is an outgoing first year teacher with a strong commitment to student teacher relationships and a desire to introduce students to, and engage them in, issues of social justice. In addition to his academic responsibilities, Jeffrey is involved with athletics at Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute. His love of sport shows through in the classroom as he creates extended sports metaphors on the fly in hopes of making key points accessible and relatable to his students. Jeffrey has an authentic presence and invites students into open conversations about content, process and respect.

Jeffrey's approach to teaching is very student centered with an emphasis on supporting and affirming the individual students that make up his classes. He told me, "We might be passionate about our subject areas, and that has some importance, but more importantly you have to be passionate about working with teenagers and just seriously enjoy being around them" (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012). He also emphasized the importance of not just being a teacher but being a real person and the necessity for students to understand that. He said,

“You can give these sane messages of, ‘If you’re acting in a frustrating way, I’m allowed to be frustrated. When you do something great, I want to celebrate with you.’ And, ‘When you need someone to talk to [I’m here]’” (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012). During the time I spent in the classroom I was able to observe Jeffrey living and teaching in just the way he described.

Sarah

Interning with Jeffrey during the fall semester was an enthusiastic teacher candidate named Sarah who had completed her student teaching with Helen and the Community Education cohort from the previous year. Sarah is a young, confident history major who has been working on integrating English Language Arts and Art into her history courses. Through her student teaching and internship experiences with the Community Education cohort, Sarah observed Helen and Jeffrey as they strove to incorporate a multiplicity of perspectives, methods and mediums in the classroom. She intends to pursue a democratic style of education with her own students once she is teaching. (Recorded conversation, October 17, 2012)

Sarah is very conscious of the value of developing community, both within the classroom as well as with engaging family partners. I believe these particular interests are reflective of Sarah’s more holistic view of education that includes many learners and teachers simultaneously working together. She noted that,

> I feel like the only times that teachers do communicate with parents or call home is when there is something negative going on in the classroom or when there needs to be a permission slip for something. That’s the only contact that’s made. There needs to be more positive contact and communication between parents and the school whether that’s through parent nights or meetings or just phone calls on positive topics. There are so

many things that we could do within a school that don't have to focus on the negative that you can get everyone involved. (Recorded conversation, October 22, 2012)

Eager to begin her teaching career, Sarah dedicates a lot of time and energy to the students in the Community Education cohort and continually finds ways to be involved even now that her internship is completed.

Helen

Helen, an innovative semi-retired educator who advocates for experiential learning, is the founder of the Community Education cohort. Her interests in travel, music and culture invite rich conversation both in and out of the classroom. Helen wears many hats within the community and is tirelessly encouraging her students to get involved by paying attention to local media and attending community events; everything from shopping at the Farmers' Market to engaging in conversation with neighbors to submitting opinion or advocacy pieces to the newspaper. As she described, "We just do, all the time, everywhere" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012).

Passionate about authentic education, Helen openly challenges elements of the school system she finds troubling, especially standardized testing. During our recorded conversations, always over coffee and always in Helen's living room, we often digressed into our worries about the state of education and concerns about the best interest of students. Helen said,

> We put value on learning so that it comes down to making the authority figure happy, or getting a gold star, or a high mark, or whatever but it's not about 'Oh my goodness I got more knowledge' and 'Let me just keep going' so the joy of learning is absent in a lot of cases. (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012)

Through the programs that she develops, and the students and teachers she works with, Helen strives to bring back the joy of learning and encourages those around her to find what has meaning to them.

Together as a Team

Taken together, this team of teacher research participants provided perspectives from multiple career stages and all were open to challenge and to be challenged by the questions that arose during the research process. Openness and flexibility defined our relationship as a team. Students were accustomed to having one to four teachers or any combination thereof. During the months that I spent in the classroom, I witnessed the sentiment "It takes a village to raise a child" be lived out through the shifting and shaping of the roles that we assumed as educators; all striving to meet the needs of our students. As individual teachers we were constantly observing students, classroom dynamics, and the learning process. There were opportunities to dialogue and debrief together as a group and consequently, through this shared reflection, we were able to determine and implement instructional strategies or organizational paradigms which we felt would be most effective. As a co-teacher and a researcher, I was given space within the team to position myself in the classroom in whatever manner best met my purposes at the time.

Jeffrey, Helen, Sarah and I hold many shared beliefs about education and the aptitude of young people and enjoy talking together about our challenges and visions as educators. The collective views that emerged from these conversations often enabled us to reach an agreement about what should be done in the classroom. There was a consensus among all of us as teachers that it was critical that students begin to cultivate a strong sense of identity, both personal and social, and in doing so recognize the contributions they are able to make to the community. During a one on one conversation about the potential for a more personalized curriculum, Helen

told me, “Somehow learning has become this package that you buy with a whole bunch of work and hoops that you jump through. And so you’ve got this stuff and it doesn’t have as much value because it’s not a part of you” (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). As a result of situations such as Helen describes, students like Elizabeth, one of the student research participants, have decided to “lean back and [not] really listen” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012).

Meet the Student Research Participants

Myles

Myles is a very self-aware young man who identifies as a kinesthetic or tactile learner and appreciates practical knowledge that is useful on a day to day basis. Myles is easily distracted and has a busy mind and busy hands; if expected to listen for long periods of time he begins to fidget. During one of our whole class conversations I offered him a paperclip to twist and manipulate in an effort to contain his movements and assist with his focus. From wrapping it around his finger to sticking it into the sole of his shoe, Myles was always moving. In school he prefers classes that are more hands on and that involve technology. His favorite class is industrial arts. Outside of school he enjoys playing video games on his Play Station in the afternoon and evening.

Myles’ knowledge base and interests could be described as eclectic. He shared with me that Greek mythology is an interest. When he was asked to choose a country to study in a former Social Studies class, he chose Greece as a way to link his interest to the assignment. Music is also a passion. One day when we sat down in the library to discuss how his project was going, someone in a neighboring room was playing a beautiful melody on the piano. Myles identified the song and explained to me the clues he had used to decode the musical mystery.

When I asked Myles what he would like to learn in Social Studies, he told me he wants to know "how the country works" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). He further qualified this by confirming it was knowledge of the sociological elements, the interactions between people, that he felt would be beneficial to him. Myles is inquisitive when it comes to understanding "what [people] do and how they act" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012) and shared with me that there is a country, New Guinea he speculated but could not remember for sure, where time does not regulate interactions. If you are engaged in a conversation it takes precedence, he said, and it is not acceptable to rush off to another appointment.

During our conversations he always made me laugh and left me with something to ponder. One afternoon while debating the role of conversation in learning, something I deem universally essential, he told me, "If it's Industrial Arts you're not supposed [to talk] because you could look over and say 'hey' and lose your fingers" (Recorded conversation, November 2, 2012). Myles approaches life in a very matter of fact manner and this was true of both our one on one conversations as well as the interactions I observed with his peers. Friendly and sociable, every time I entered the room Myles was among the first to greet me.

Elizabeth

The second student I was honoured to work with is a young woman named Elizabeth. Elizabeth is sweet and warm and quick to engage. Although quiet in larger group settings, she effectively uses body language to affirm those in her presence with encouraging smiles and eye contact. When it was just the two of us, there was never a moment of silence while we walked the halls to and from the library for our recorded conversations; there was always something to chat about. Two of her self-proclaimed loves are music and people. In our first conversation Elizabeth exclaimed, "People! I love learning about people!" (Recorded conversation, October

10, 2012) This love of people is demonstrated in her interactions with others, the way she attends to the individuals around her in the classroom, and through her inclusive nature. She ensures that everyone is included in the conversation. As an introspective young woman, Elizabeth is aware of her growing edges and is committed to personal growth. She confided, “I’m a really shy person so being in the Community Education cohort kind of opened me up. I used to never talk unless someone asked me a question and now I’m trying to start the conversations and making a lot of new friends” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). Elizabeth views her entry into high school as a time to develop her identity and consciously attends to this construction process. She is awake to the impact that the peer group she associates with will have and is taking time to establish where she fits in best (Field note, November 1, 2012). Elizabeth is thoughtful about the person she is and the person she hopes to become. Her care, concern and acceptance of people as they are is refreshing.

Elizabeth prefers the humanities and subject areas that are conducive to creativity and expression. She told me, “I really like Social Studies a lot actually. I like learning about my heritage and where I come from because I like learning what happened back then and how we are evolving towards new stuff” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). Elizabeth has a greater sense of social responsibility than many of the youth I have worked with; her love of people and personal areas of interest are reflective of this. Of learning about First Nations peoples she noted, “It’s really useful to respect people” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012).

Placed based and experiential education are suited to Elizabeth’s needs as a learner. Commenting on her individual learning preferences she told me, “I learn better hands on and I don’t really learn very well being in a very structured place” (Recorded conversation, October 10,

2012). The class had recently taken a trip to the Western Development Museum as part of their study about the history of Saskatchewan. About this experience she said, "I learned way more there than I probably would have if I had to research it on the computer or something because we are moving around and actually seeing the exhibits" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012).

Jordan

My third student research participant was an amazing young woman named Jordan. Although reserved at times, Jordan is exceptionally insightful and this is reflected in how she understands her own positioning as well as how she responds to the thoughts and actions of others. During a class meeting, or family meeting as the Community Education cohort class calls them, Jordan called her peers' attention to their behavior on the bus. The students rely on public transportation as they travel around the city to various destinations for learning experiences. She had observed that when on the bus they have a habit of ignoring the presence of the other riders. Jordan explained to me in one of our conversations how she saw their collective actions unfolding on the bus, "I'll look around and if the person they are sitting next to isn't a part of it and they're looking quite uncomfortable, I'll realize how they're feeling" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Her mature and observant nature enabled us to have many wonderful and intuitive conversations during the research process.

Jordan has an infectious laugh and in many ways she is mature beyond her years. A lover of music and photography she is skilled in both creative and logical processes. Her photos illustrate her eye for detail and ability to capture emotion. She identifies English as her favorite subject because she enjoys the opportunity to express her opinions (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). As a conscientious student, Jordan takes her academics seriously and scholarly success is important to her. When describing her ideal learning situation she told me,

“If it’s a project I want to know to a T what I’m trying to write about and what I’m learning but at the same time I want a little leeway” (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012).

When it comes to Social Studies, Jordan told me, “I liked researching about the countries because then I could learn about the arts side of it which I kind of enjoyed and then the economics and the food” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). She would prefer depth over breadth, voicing a frustration that “you’re learning about the other countries and it’s just what is on the surface” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). Hence she took it upon herself to bring these elements to her above mentioned research project. Jordan, much like Elizabeth, articulated a desire for the content to be personal and contain a humanistic element.

I treasured every moment of my time with these three students: the questions we played with, the stories we shared, and above all the opportunity to sit in conversation and learn about one another in an authentic way. Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan shared their experiences with me in a way that enabled me to take a glimpse into their world; the world of a grade nine student in a Social Studies classroom.

Tell Me How You Feel About Social Studies

Myles, Elizabeth, Jordan and I conducted our taped conversations in the bright and welcoming library at Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute. The conversations coincided with class time and were always in the afternoon. Because of the length of the class that spans the whole afternoon, we were able to find opportunities to sit down together without disrupting instructional time, taking advantage of built in reading and work periods. Whenever it was convenient for each of the student research participants, we would talk for 20 to 30 minutes and then return to class.

During my first individual recorded conversations with the students, we endeavored to explore and, deconstruct what Social Studies is. This seemed like a natural starting place as I wanted to know what their opinions were about the subject as a whole, considering also the related content addressed in the classroom, and selected activities and assignments. I was interested in how, taken together, these helped to form a more universal understanding of the subject matter for the students.

Myles initial reaction to my question was that Social Studies equated to "work" and then he continued this thought by defining the subject as "mostly studying different countries and doing powerpoints or Prezies2 on them" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). In a later conversation, Myles expressed how "with Social class you just get told to do something. You just research and type it up" (Recorded conversation, November 2, 2012). When I asked him if there was a way for teachers to make it more engaging, he responded with, "No, probably not, because Social is a really boring class" (Recorded conversation, November 2, 2012). As much as I hate to admit it, I know that Myles is not alone in his experiences and perceptions of this subject area. I myself can recall instances of feeling the same way as a student, in my junior high years in particular. Social Studies was not always my favorite subject in school at that point. In fact, prior to beginning high school and becoming a student of Mr. Hollings, I too felt resentment toward the subject that seemed to be comprised entirely of impractical textbook readings and accompanying fill in the blank questions, and static essay prompts that left little room for creativity or independent thought. Just as Myles noted, I understand the student experience of boredom, moving from presentation to presentation about topics that may or may not have been contextualized by the teacher.

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2 According to prezi.com a Prezi is a presentation tool (virtual whiteboard) that helps you organize and share your ideas.

My conversation with Elizabeth, as we tried to tease apart the purpose of Social Studies, was a little more encouraging. Although she does enjoy Social Studies, she confessed, "I don't want to learn about stuff that I won't always be using. I'd rather learn about important stuff" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). She is asking for relevance and connections to her current life and to the future life she perceives her education will prepare her for. Later, our conversation moved to a more specific focus on school experiences and I asked Elizabeth if there was anything in particular in her past classes that stood out for her. When she thought about lessons and topics that she felt were disengaging, she recounted the following:

> Learning about the land all we did is notes and videos about grass growing and stuff and it wasn't that interesting. You don't really pay attention if you're not totally interested in it … If you are interested in stuff you actually learn; if not, you lean back and don't really listen." (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012)

Elizabeth's love of people and her imagination for the past keep her desire to learn and explore the Social Studies curriculum alive because as she said, "I find I can picture my family doing all this stuff and I'm like whoa that's interesting" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012) but it does not come without its challenges. There are times when the subject matter and delivery style become simply too dry for Elizabeth to stay engaged. I can't help but wonder how long her craving for authenticity and relevance can go unsatisfied before she too will become disillusioned and, like Myles, struggle to see any redeeming elements of the subject?

During my first conversation with Jordan I asked her what she remembered from her past experiences with Social Studies. I watched as she thought, beginning to formulate a response and then pausing for further reflection, and I wondered what she was seeing as she sifted through her memories. Was she recalling a specific assignment or moment of realization? Could she see

the classroom where she spent so many precious hours? Did she have a Mr. Hollings that brought the subject alive? Or, like Myles, did she spend a majority of her time researching and presenting? Breaking the silence and bringing us both back to the present moment, Jordan told me, "I'm trying to think back to my past Social Studies classes and I don't really remember much. But, I don't know, it was just a bunch of notes honestly" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). There was a tone in her voice that is hard to describe. Perhaps partially deflated, maybe a touch frustrated, but the hint of indifference was distinctly there.

I was disheartened by the general sense of indifference that the students felt towards my beloved subject area. While none of them proclaimed a dislike for the class, perhaps for my benefit, it was obvious that they felt little connection to what they were learning. Goodlad (2004) explains that

> The topics commonly included in the social sciences appear as though they would be of great human interest. But something strange seems to have happened to them on the way to the classroom. The topics of study become removed from their intrinsically human character, reduced to the dates and places readers will recall memorizing for tests. (p. 212)

This seems to be exactly the case for Myles, Elizabeth and Jordan but it invokes further questions for me; namely, what is it that is happening to the content, skills and attitudes outlined in the social studies curriculum on the way to the classroom? Social Studies is intended to invite students into the social world they are a part of through an inquiry into the people and places of the past and present while they themselves negotiate the position they would like to assume in society. Rationales speak of "engaged, active, informed and responsible citizens" (Alberta Education, 2007, p. 1) and boast "the ultimate aim is for students who have a sense of themselves

as active participants and citizens in an inclusive, culturally diverse, interconnected world" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009). If it is true that "there is evidence of a very real concern that the curriculum be knowledge-based, interdisciplinary, and capable of connecting with students" (Beyer & Liston in Greene, 1992, p. 391) then it may be beneficial to reexamine our practice. The intention of the curriculum is clear, yet that intention is not being realized. Why? Is it what we are teaching? Is it also how we are teaching it?

Upon asking Jordan if there were any topics in particular she did not care for she laughed. In an immediate and blunt response she stated, "Geography. I don't like learning about longitude and latitude and I've had to draw the map of the world on a big piece of paper and I wasn't really fond of that" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). As the words left her mouth I was transported right back to the days of sitting at the kitchen table colouring maps as part of my junior high school Social Studies homework. Countries had to be fully coloured as outlining was not permitted, they were to be labeled with the name written in a straight line, and blue was reserved for water only. Neatness was a category of its own in the assessment of our maps. I remember on occasion my Mom and me sharing the burden of my brother's maps. I enjoyed colouring and was always proud of the beautiful creations I produced however he was not at all interested in this task and colouring was not his forte. As Goodlad (2004) says, "something happened on the way to classroom" (p. 212) that changed the nature of a learning experience that should have revolved around the exploration of the world, of the peoples that call these places home, and how our lives are all connected in some way, shape or form. The experiences of Jordan, my brother and I serve as one example of an activity that is misaligned with the intent of the course. The development of engaged and active citizens cannot be inspired,

or measured, by rote mechanical exercises that concentrate on neatness, fine motor control, or persistence.

When I questioned Myles about whether he felt that Social Studies was relevant to his daily life he considered my query and then replied, "So far no, but, ya, so far no" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). I cannot help but wonder what relevance, if any, my brother and Jordan would find in their map drawing and colouring assignments and was Myles recalling similar experiences when he responded, paused, and then confirmed his response? Taken together, these individual accounts serve as powerful evidence and further support the notion that "junior and senior high students [view] the social studies to be the least useful subjects in relation to their present and future needs" (Goodlad, 2004, p. 210) and perhaps it is because "much of traditional schooling is concerned with making children devote themselves to studies that make no sense in the context of their lives" (Bateson, 1994, p. 198). And yet, if you consider the intent of the Social Studies, it is arguably the exact opposite; these are the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are necessary for our students to cultivate to be active and engaged citizens. At issue is not only what they are learning but also what they are *not* learning.

I find myself comparing and contrasting some of my own experiences with Social Studies as a student with those of my research participants. One morning a bus dropped our Political Studies 30 class off in downtown Calgary, just outside the entrance to the Calgary Drop-In and Rehab Center. Located on the edge of downtown, the modern red brick building that overlooks the Bow River opened a few short years before our visit. Although our class was not unfamiliar with the city of Calgary, accessing goods and services on a regular basis with our families and friends, this was not an area we frequented. Perhaps we would drive by en route, watching the buildings blur together through the car window, but this was a sidewalk we had never stood on.

I remember the feeling of vulnerability that washed over me as I stood with my classmates awaiting directions from Mr. Hollings. Like many of my peers, this was an experience far removed from my frame of reference. I will admit that we huddled close to Mr. Hollings, acting much more like small children than the high school students who we were. Where there would have normally been animated conversation followed by bursts of laughter, there was relative silence; a telling sign of our hesitancy. In the sanctuary of our classroom we had grappled with understandings of politics and economics, trying to make sense of the beliefs and values of the political parties represented in our multi-party system, and of monetary policies, tax configurations and the impact of social services on society. On the street in Calgary the theories we had discussed and deliberated at length seemed detached from the reality we were witnessing. In the classroom the issues had been faceless, nameless, a series of hypothetical "what ifs" that youth of our socio-economic standing could not identify with, even though we tried. Standing on the street, the imagined assumptions were no longer our context for understanding. Standing on the street the issues had faces and names.

Our day began with a tour of the facility. We walked slowly, treading on what felt like unstable ground even though nothing about the building suggested a lack of structural integrity. We sought a balance between looking and staring, a conscious negotiation that seemed to emerge as a result of trepidation, as we took in our surroundings. I remember looking at the small bunk beds and thinking about camp. To me a bunk bed is synonymous with camp and all the wonders that accompany that experience; it didn't matter if the beds were uncomfortable and afforded no privacy because sleep was not a priority at camp. To the residents at the shelter, a bunk bed meant something entirely different. It meant not having to find a space on the floor to unroll the blue mat handed to them by a staff member at the shelter that evening. For the residents it was a

source of pride, it was their own space, it was home. Even now I find the juxtaposition of these two interpretations overwhelming.

It was as we prepared to serve a hot lunch to the clients that our own insecurities, and I will regretfully admit prejudices, came out. Everyone wanted to help the kitchen staff plate the food in the kitchen rather than serve the meals to the clients. It took a few trips of purposefully directing my legs to move and forcing them to follow through before I was able to move with ease between the kitchen and the tables, balancing trays as I went. I remember looking across the cafeteria at Mr. Hollings and seeing him smile. I imagine he sensed that the concepts we were discussing in class were starting to become real for us.

That afternoon we had the chance to meet with residents and hear their stories about adversity they faced in their lives and how they were working to overcome obstacles to regain health, stability, and pursue the lives they envisioned for themselves. I vividly remember the poise and posture of those telling the stories and I remember feeling that my life experiences, my trials and tribulations, paled in comparison and in such a way that might impede me from ever truly understanding. This was the beginning of my realization that every person has a story to tell and without listening to that story we will never know the person. This was where the notion that society is a complex formation of individuals with varying needs and skills and that we have personal responsibilities to be cognizant of the peoples, places and issues that make up our communities came alive to me. I realized we cannot consider ourselves informed simply by virtue of voting and watching the news. I experienced how knowledge is constructed through listening to and learning with others while relating and sharing experiences and, even then, a holistic understanding may evade us. I came to understand that what is important is that we keep trying.

At the end of the afternoon, as we stood on the corner waiting for the bus to return us to school, we likely still would have appeared out of place to a passerby but we no longer felt it in the same way. The self-consciousness we felt in these surroundings when we arrived earlier in the day, a self-consciousness that initially inhibited our interactions with residents in the neighborhood seemed to have lessened. Our eyes were opened a little wider, and we had an inkling that we could make a small difference here and now with actions as simple as a welcoming smile and a listening ear in the lives of our new acquaintances. We were not clinging to Mr. Hollings as we had been that morning. Instead there was a beginning understanding and acceptance of difference and a desire to understand the lives of others different from our own. That day we were challenged to consider issues of adversity, poverty, substance abuse, and social services from a different perspective; a perspective that had been foreign to us. We were acquiring the knowledge and experiences that would allow us to begin to develop the capacities, such as respect, acceptance and empathy that would assist us as we grew into active and engaged citizens. Pieces of our learning were collective - the operational structures of the Drop-In Center, the history and mission of the organization – but the bigger pieces, the most important ones, were individual. As we made sense of the experience together through observation and dialogue and then continued in a process of personal reflection, we became connected to our own beliefs and values and to how that situated us on the political and economic spectrum. Mr. Hollings extended an invitation for us to join him on a transformative journey, guiding us to a site which presented the opportunity, with his support, to shift the theory from our textbooks to practical understanding in the real world.

Smith and Sobel (2010) wrote, "Drawing upon experiences and issues shared among all human communities and engaging students in work that has meaning beyond the classroom,

teachers can diminish the boundary between school and place, enlivening the curriculum and demonstrating to young people the immediate importance of what they are learning" (p. 59). Mr. Hollings encouraged us to participate in a conversation about … in an authentic way, affirming that our thoughts were both valid and valuable, and challenging us to…in ways that created meaningful learning experiences.

These experiences, this genuine, relevant and connected learning, such as I experienced when Mr. Hollings took our class to work in the shelter, is what Myles, Elizabeth and Jordan are asking for. I think of a conversation with Jordan when she explained one of her tensions with Social Studies. She told me, "You're not really getting into it. You're just kind of taking these notes of a bunch of numbers and you're not actually getting to know like Christopher Columbus. You just know that he came over here" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). It appears to me that Jordan is asking for "depth over speed and relatedness over scale" (Block, 2008, p. 75) and a chance to explore the "intrinsically human nature" (Goodlad, 2004, p. 212) that is meant to be at the heart of the social sciences; she wishes to know more about the man and his decisions and the impacts he had in a more connected and meaningful sense.

The lack of connection between students and subject matter is often seen in the teaching methods being used and it is also seen in the resources being selected. In his seminal study, Goodlad (2004) found that "senior high classes were characterized by a wide variety of books found in use. Yet there was a certain sameness too – in the textbooks on history and government, for example, a kind of remoteness or detachment from real people living in a time and place" (p. 211). For each of the student research participants it came down to wanting to learn about people. Myles would later tell me there was something specific he was searching for in his research, "There has to be some funny story included when they came across to Canada or

something like that" (Recorded conversation, October, 19, 2012). Here he is seeking a human element because "stories reach sad or comic or absurd denouements, while theoretical arguments are simply conclusive or inconclusive" (Ricoeur in Bruner, 1986, p. 14). For Elizabeth and Jordan too their interest is not in timelines, dates and facts, but rather they want to know about the individuals, the people whose lives create the story.

As these students approach the brink of adulthood it is a pivotal time in their development. I cannot help but wonder what it is that students need most from us as educators? I think as teachers it's important that we acknowledge the experiences of our students by encouraging a process through which we are affirming, supporting and "striving to make sense of the young people's world within their own analytical frameworks" (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 5). Through introducing them to situations and contexts that have meaning for them and thereby allowing them to openly explore in a way that makes sense for them we invite feelings of validation. Through such exploration it is hoped they will cultivate habits of mind and dispositions that they will carry with them in all the roles they assume both inside and outside of school. If students are able to relate and to cultivate such habits of mind, "local knowledge and local coming together ought to counter the tendency toward abstraction, as should a conscious concern for the particular, the everyday, the concrete" (Greene, 1992, p. 23).

The Roots Project

When I began my research with them, Jeffrey, Sarah and the grade nine students were wrapping up a study about place, more specifically about Saskatchewan and their connection to it. With foundational building blocks already positioned, having considered their connection to the province, the time was right to extend the connection to place to an exploration of family and roots. In their previous unit on Saskatchewan the students had explored a variety of sources

including a trip to the Western Development Museum that details, through beautifully crafted exhibits, the settlement period on the prairies.

Assignment Details

The Roots project asked students to investigate their own roots through a combination of primary and secondary sources. When selecting the criteria for this assignment, it was our intent to be as open as possible so that students felt welcome to choose whatever element of their family story resonated most with them, in either a historical context or from a present day perspective. In leaving the choice to the individual students, we talked about the possibilities of a project surrounding an artifact in their home or a historical or recent experience of a family member. If they were not comfortable examining or disclosing more localized or personal information, there was the opportunity to explore the broader experience of a cultural or ethnic group they identify with. We did not want to try and force students to make a connection that was not organic; we felt it was essential that they were able to see themselves in the work that they were doing. Through this openness, we resisted the tendency to compartmentalize students and their experiences. The assignment description given to students read:

> This research paper will see you write an essay that describes the experiences of people from your family or ethnic/cultural group in Canadian society. You might consider the following options, or come up with your own idea:
>
> - If your ancestors immigrated to Canada, describe their experiences.
> - If your ancestors are First Nations, Inuit or Metis, write about their experiences in Canadian society.
> - Are there any significant events that have influenced your family history (significant relatives, accomplishments, contributions to their communities?)

Expectations for the Roots project were detailed as follows:

> Students will hand in one typed good copy accompanied by an outline/concept map and evidence of research. Interview questions and notes should also be included. The length of your finished paper should be at least two to three pages of typed double spaced size 12 font. Many of you will need more room than this to tell your story. As always, don't worry about word count; make your words count!

The assignment description and expectations were given to students in the form of a handout that was glued into their field journals.

Intended Outcomes

Although as a teaching team we were concerned with the broad rationale of Social Studies that strives to foster active and engaged citizens, we had two specific curricular outcomes in mind with regards to the Roots project. From the Social Studies curriculum we were considering the following outcome: PA9.33 "Investigate the roles and responsibilities of members of the societies studied and those of citizens in contemporary Canada". In honouring the integrated humanities approach, we intertwined the Social Studies outcomes with the following outcomes from the English Language Arts curriculum: CC9.2a and CC9.2b4 "Create and present an individual researched inquiry project related to a topic, theme, or issue studied in English Language Arts". Within the Roots project, we chose to focus on identity within the family context which is supported by the description of the course:

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3 In the Saskatchewan Social Studies Curriculum PA represents Power and Authority (To investigate the processes and structures of power and authority and implications for individuals, communities, and nations.).
4 In the Saskatchewan English Language Arts Curriculum CC represents Compose and Create (Students will extend their abilities to represent, speak, and write to explore and present thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a variety of forms for a variety of purposes and audiences.).

Social Studies education can be defined as the study of people and their relationships with their social, physical and technological environments. The study of those environments becomes most relevant when students are encouraged to make connections to their own lives as they explore and apply knowledge, skills, thinking processes and values" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 7)

This project also supports development in all of the Broad Areas of Learning: Engaged Citizens, Lifelong Learners, and Self, Community and Place as outlined by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

As a teaching team we identified more informal outcomes, hoping to see students adopt new habits of mind, encouraging them to attend to the stories and experiences of others more closely, and strengthen their relationships; an alternative way to living in the seemingly rushed and impersonal world.

Our Process

A class reading and discussion of *Borders.*

As a class, we read and discussed Thomas King's short story *Borders* that chronicles the dilemma a Canadian First Nations mother and son experience at the customs office, on their way to the United States of America, when they refuse to classify their identity as anything other than Blackfoot. This anticipatory reading was intended to open up conversation and invite topics and questions that extend beyond the 'who's who' matching of a family tree and invite space for the tensions that some students may encounter during this project. As a teaching team we hoped to demonstrate to our students that issues of family and identity are complex issues. The preface of the Roots assignment was thoughtfully crafted by the teaching team to read:

In the short story “Borders” we learned about how the concept of identity is connected to our roots. In “Borders” and in the story books, we got to know characters who understood their roots and connect their sense of self with their cultural and familial heritage. We also saw characters who were struggling to accept or value their roots as an important part of who they are.

An exploration of a series of thematic picture books.

A series of picture books were also judiciously selected to serve as inspiration in our anticipatory lessons. This instructional strategy, and the use of this style of literature to explore complex issues, provided students with the opportunity to connect with and reflect upon themes and concepts at a basic level. From there, they were able to compare and contrast their own experiences and interpretations and begin to develop a more enduring understanding of their personal situation alongside others.

The literature selected included *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney (1982), *The Name Jar* by Yangsook Choi (2001), *The Composition* by Antonio Skarmeta (2000), *Voices in the Park* by Anthony Browne (2000), *The Elders Are Watching* by David Bouchard (2004), *The Table Where the Rich People Sit* by Byrd Baylor (1994), and *What You Know First* by Patricia MacLachlan (1998). The foci of these pieces are rich and diverse, addressing themes of legacy, tradition, values, and point of view. Group discussion questions included: What is the impact of diversity on communities, nations, and the world? How important is a sense of self? Do values change over time or generations? Who or what defines us? How important are our family histories? Can you be connected to a place you have never been?

A rocky start: Students struggle to make connections.

It was very interesting that the students' first instincts in response to the assignment were to express their cultural make up in ratios similar to the following: "I'm half Scottish and half Irish" or "I'm a quarter Ukrainian" and so on (Field note, October 4, 2012). While this is undeniably one way to understand identity and it denotes some sense of self-awareness, we probed the students to go further, to understand the stories and how the reverberations of the stories might impact them. Jeffrey reminded the students to keep asking themselves, "Where am I in all of this?" (Field note, October 3, 2012). We wanted them to persevere, reflect, and then dig deeper. We believed they had the capacity to make connections and assume responsibility for their learning. We felt that it was important because "at issue here is the value of students … taking hold of their own education … and inserting their own historical position in the shape of the curriculum" (Willinsky, 2009, p. 122). It is a different style of learning; transformative learning occurs in the absence of a generalized, one size fits all textbook.

While some students struggled initially with making connections and putting themselves into their assignment, again we encouraged them to continue. As Sarah notes, "To ask those important questions, to ask why, to create those connections with their community and themselves and their family, a lot of them haven't asked those questions or thought that deep before" (Recorded conversation, October 17, 2012). For many students, this assignment was outside of their frame of reference. From how the student participants described their earlier experiences with social studies, it appears likely they would have been "instructed to be quiet so others [could] tell [them] what to think" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 28). With the Roots Project, the information they were seeking was not going to be dispensed by a teacher at the front of the room nor in a pre-existing neat package with subtitles, nor was it going to be found on the

internet waiting to be found and transformed into a power point or paper. Instead, the students were in control of creating their own knowledge and understandings.

Teachers as learners: Sharing experiences.

In our process it was important that we as teachers be learners alongside the students. Sarah shared with the class a census document that she had discovered containing her Great Grandmother's name; she was among the first women to receive homestead land as a result of her husband's passing. Sarah spoke of how this was a cornerstone in their history and how it resonated with her family. For Sarah, feelings of pride and accomplishments were contrasted with questions. Sarah told the class she could not help but wonder, "Whose land was she given?" (Field note, October 15, 2012) and what were the lasting effects?

As I passed a photo of my Uncle Tom around the room, I read aloud a piece of the story told in Chapter One, confiding to the class that my uncles and the love of people, history and story they bestowed on me was a large part of what compelled me to become a Social Studies teacher.

It was our intent to exemplify that there was room for the students to choose, reflect, and play with the topic they had chosen. Deci (1994) defines autonomy as "to act in accord with one's self – it means feeling free and volitional in one's actions. When autonomous, people are fully willing to do what they are doing, and they embrace the activity with a sense of interest and commitment" (p. 2). It is in this state that "their actions emanate from their true sense of self, so they are being authentic" (p. 2). Aligned with Deci's understanding of autonomy, Helen encouraged students to "make it personal because it is" (Field notes, October 15, 2012).

Take a nugget, build a story

In an attempt to inspire and prompt some of the students who continued to struggle to personalize their projects, challenging the preconceived notions they harbored about school and learning, Sarah and I realized that we would need to slow down. While she and I already embraced and valued this style of learning, we had to give our students time to catch up to us and to break through some of the boundaries instilled by more traditional school experiences. We compiled a selection of objects, some of which had distinct meaning from our own personal contexts while others were selected at random: one knitted mitten, a black and white photo, a baseball, a bell, a red plastic toy shovel, an antique brooch, a blank CD, half of a ticket stub, a trophy, and an old tea cup with matching saucer. In small groups, we invited the students to select an object and imagine a story about the piece they selected, building on Helen's encouragement to "take a nugget and build a story" (field note, October 15, 2012). We hoped they would "move toward an understanding of what is involved in telling and understanding great stories and how it is that stories create a reality of their own – in life as in art" (Bruner, p. 43, 1986).

This activity was the turning point for many students as they began to conceptualize their projects and execute their research. The teaching team often heard little stories about conversations students had shared with family members and some artifacts even trickled into the classroom. Students also struck up conversations with each other about their assignments with genuine interest as they all were so different.

The Beginnings: Myles, Elizabeth and Jordan Talk About Their Assignments

Myles chose to chronicle the immigration story of his grandparents, mother and two aunts. As the assignment was introduced just before Thanksgiving, while gathered together with his

Mom, siblings and grandparents that weekend, Myles told me they played a game of trivia focused on England where they tried to answer questions like, "Where was Mom born?" "Where was Grandfather born?" "Where did they live?" And it was his Grandmother who held all the answers. With a smile, Myles began to talk about accents and how when his Mom was around her parents, or on the telephone with them, she adopted an English accent that at other times was not detectable. (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012) When I asked if he had any specific lingering curiosities about his family story or the research he responded, "I'm just happy that they're here because I'm here. If my Mom didn't move, she wouldn't have met my Dad" (Recorded conversation, October 19, 2012). Myles seemed grateful for his Grandparents decision to relocate their then young family and recognized that this decision had a profound impact on his Mom's life including growing up, falling in love, and starting a family with a Canadian man.

Elizabeth, who enjoys a very special connection with her great-grandmother, chose to investigate the life of her great-great-grandmother who was of the first generation of her family to be born and raised in Saskatoon. In this case, Elizabeth was already well situated in her own family story but now she had been given the opportunity to connect it to her studies; she now had an outlet to share, a new lens through which to understand and the opportunity to situate it in a societal context. She smiled as she told me, "My Great Grandma tells me a story every time I go see her, which is every week, so I already have so many stories and she is such a good story teller, it's fun" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). A week later, when I had another chance to sit down with Elizabeth, I asked her how she was feeling about her assignment. I was encouraged by her response when she said, "I'm actually really engaged in it. I find it really

interesting because I found out stuff I never knew before about my family" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012).

Both Myles and Elizabeth were taking the initiative to learn more. Myles sent an email to the family members he did not see on a regular basis while Elizabeth was able to spend some time going through a multigenerational family history book shared with her by her Great Grandma. While on very separate journeys, they were each accessing primary sources and questioning and listening to understand as they collected pieces for their individual puzzles. During a visit from Helen one afternoon she shared the following thought with the class, "You are researching the most important story of your life because it's who you are" (Field note, October 15, 2012) and this seemed to resonate not only in the students' attitudes but what they were expressing to me as well in our conversations.

In the beginning Jordan seemed less sure than her peers. In part her hesitancy seemed to stem from the composition of her family. Jordan lives with her mom and they do not maintain contact with either her mom's birth or adoptive parents and, while she feels comfortable and supported by her family, she voiced an awareness that her assignment would likely take a different direction than the majority of her peers. Initially Jordan spoke of wanting to research a little more about the Ukrainian culture as a whole and thereby take a more general approach. After some thought and discussion, she decided to pen an open letter to the family that she did not know, offering information about herself as well as inquiring about them. In the days that followed, when I checked in with her she told me, "With my Roots assignment I'm pretty into it, like I'm not tuning out because it's more personal and I'm always kind of thinking about it … Sometimes I'll just be sitting at home and I'll be thinking about it out of nowhere which is kind of a first to be honest" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). There is a significant

difference between not paying attention in class, which is what Jordan had noted earlier she would do in Social Studies when the content was not relevant, and carrying the assignment with you in your mind, reflecting on it during day to day life outside of the physical structure of the school. Jordan's genuine engagement was a response to the invitation to bring her own life, her own experiences into her learning. The opening of Jordan's powerful and emotive letter reads:

> Dear Family,
>
> I would like to start off this letter by saying a great big hello and if we were actually meeting I would probably hug you too. Well, my name is Jordan and I'm fourteen turning fifteen. The thing is, if I actually knew who you were I wouldn't have to say that as you would already know. Just like you'd already know I've got brown hair and blue/green eyes and sometimes when I laugh I snort. It bothers me that I don't know who my family is, like my ancestors, or the type of people they were. Did they look like me? Act like I do?

Although Jordan's questions cannot be answered through this assignment, she is engaging with thoughts and questions that allow her to develop her own understanding.

Week after week my student research participants updated me on their progress with their Roots Project and shared with me what they had learned. The conversations flowed as they always had so much to say. One day Elizabeth and I were walking down the hallway when she suddenly slowed and turned to look at me. "You're going to read our papers, right?" she asked. As I smiled and nodded she said, "Good" (field note, October 23, 2012). She wanted me to know her story. Helen captured what was unfolding with the Roots Project perfectly, telling me:

> For years we've always had these textbooks of stories, or writings, or even ideas trying to put kids into an imaginary sense but when you talk about your own story, even if you

> don't know these people or the connection has been long, long, long gone it's still your story and in discovering that story you find out it's not just all about me being here at fourteen years of age but it's about me being connected to this past history and building in this future so you become, not the star, but the main character and even though it's about someone else it's about you and kids come to life when they do that because it's theirs. (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012)

I could see just that, Myles, Elizabeth and Jordan coming to life right before my eyes. To achieve the crucial rationale of Social Studies students must be invited "to tell their stories, to pose their own questions, to be present – from their own perspective – to the common world" (Greene, 1992, p. 34).

Chapter Three: Elizabeth, Myles and Jordan

Who we are and where we come from, whatever the backstory may be, impacts us to the very core. It is the essence of our being and the power lies not in knowing all the minute little details but rather in an understanding of how the reverberations of people, place, and time impact our thoughts and habits of mind, the way we relate to one another, and the subsequent roles we envision ourselves playing in society. A journey of self-understanding precedes the ability to understand others. This understanding can only be fully realized through a commitment to consciously attend to our own experiences, and the experiences of others, through listening and reflection: “Wisdom, then, is born of the overlapping of lives, the resonance between stories” (Bateson, 2000, p. 243).

I always perceived teaching to be somewhat of an inherited occupation, and while my opinions have since changed, I remember feeling like an outsider in the absence of any direct familial connection to the profession. I bought into the rhetoric that it was a natural progression – teachers’ kids become teachers themselves. This fallacy was further engrained by the connections I witnessed in my small town schools.

With a desire to take part in rural education, I applied to do my student teaching internship in a small town in central Alberta. This move led me to board with my Great Aunt Martha; a woman I barely knew anything about. The one thing I did know about her was that, prior to raising a family on the farm, she had been known as “Miss Clark” at the local school. No sooner had I stepped into the staff room on my first Monday morning than a teacher looked at me and asked, “Who are you related to?” It felt almost as if an acceptable response was not given I would be promptly deemed a trespasser and escorted out of the building. My parents had chosen to name me Lindsey, varying the spelling from Lindsay, my Grandmother’s maiden name

and the married name of my Auntie Martha. Although my connection was somewhat disguised, and from where I stood a formality at best, upon disclosure of my connection to Auntie Martha, the staff room erupted with banter and laughter about "Leaky Lindsay," the less than reliable goalie my Auntie Martha had given birth to. It was as simple as that; my acceptance was granted. While I harboured fraudulent feelings about this acceptance, I kept it to myself because, for all I knew, "Leaky Lindsay" could have been among us.

Despite being instantly affiliated with my Mom's cousins who grew up in the area, I could not have picked them out in a crowd. I had not grown up with that side of the family and in many regards, at that point in time, they may as well have been strangers. That fall morning I was torn; I had not had any intention of sharing that information with the staff and certainly not on the first day or in such a public fashion. While my Auntie Martha had filled the void I felt about teaching running in families, we were just beginning to get to know one another.

The process of learning where we come from elicits many thoughts and feelings, some joyous, others marked by anxiety and apprehension. Yet in my own experience of coming to know Auntie Martha, beyond the superficial ways of knowing, like the flawless handwriting that looped across the annual Christmas cards I associated her with, I found much deeper meaning than I expected. Moving through the awkwardness, the tensions, the partner dance in which neither of us were sure of the steps, I experienced growth and found understanding. Although my intent was to come to know this woman who is my aunt, I realized "I was seeking understanding of myself as much as I was seeking understanding of herself" (Makler, 1991, p. 32). The stories we hear and share "attach us to others and our own histories by providing a tapestry rich with threads of time, place, character and even advice on what we might do with our lives" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). In light of the fluidity that characterizes any

pivotal time in personal development, feelings especially pervasive in the teenage years, this quest into understanding pieces of family story and history offers a foundation, roots from which to grow. I hoped for the students to experience these tensions and excitements in balance and perhaps identify and endeavor to fill the gaps they may encounter. I think of Uncle Tom and our last conversation together. I hope that I am able to inspire the students I work with to ask questions as I grapple with the remorse that comes from not writing down his stories because “now there is no way to fill these gaps, for there is no one left to tell… Now that it’s too late, I wonder why I did not ask” (Makler, 1991, p. 39).

What Does it Mean to Have Roots?

Elizabeth and I were comfortably seated in the school library one afternoon when I posed the question, “What does it mean to have roots?” Insightful and mature, Elizabeth told me, “It’s where you came from and are growing from.” As I smiled at her, she furthered her explanation by describing someone who was rooted as someone with stability. “She’s a stable person and she knows all about herself: where she’s going, where she’s from, and she’s confident” (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). I couldn’t help but wonder to what degree the wonderful relationship Elizabeth shares with her Great Grandma influenced her thinking, or if she was thinking of her grandma in that moment. Dewey (1938) speculates that “issues and problems of present social life are in such intimate and direct connection with the past that students cannot be prepared to understand either these problems or the best way of dealing with them without delving into their roots in the past” (p. 77). It seems that the girl who Elizabeth described would possess the skills, attitudes, and knowledge of context that would make her an effective thinker and problem solver.

As a class one afternoon, we spent an hour browsing and discussing a selection of picture books and then we came together to discuss some of the themes that emerged. This gave the students the opportunity to share their thoughts and connections to the stories with one another. Our conversation shifted and flowed as different pieces of literature were highlighted and students compared and contrasted interpretations and experiences. Students who had lived in a number of towns and cities understood connection to place in a different light than those who had been born and raised in Saskatoon. While some students felt that their given names were central to their identity, others dismissed it as a mere formality. Eventually we found ourselves deliberating how important it is to have a sense of self. One student commented, “Very, we need it to know who we are and to know what we want in life.” Another student agreed, “Your sense of self gives you a sense of originality” (Field note, October 4, 2012). It seems the importance of exploration and understanding of self is not lost on students. From this conversation, I saw how advantageous it is as an educator to explore opportunities that incorporate these themes and to facilitate classroom dialogue in a manner that acknowledges and encourages the incorporation of student experience.

As a teacher I feel a sense of urgency when it comes to addressing these topics, knowing “we have become detached from our continuity in time, and thus seemingly insulated from our history; we live encapsulated in a present reality which has been severed at its roots” (Freeman, 2000, p. xviii). This detachment is worrisome when we take into consideration Elizabeth’s insight that if one is to cultivate a holistic understanding of self, one needs to know both “where she’s going” and “where she’s from” (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). In many cases, the information that satisfies the curiosities surrounding the need to know where you are from is slipping away due to lack of connection to family history and knowledge and communication

with those who may be able to help solve the puzzle. From this research process it was apparent that many students in the class were not striving to make sense of their own experiences within the context of their families on their own volition. To me it seemed as if they had each constructed the perimeter of the puzzle of their story; an assembly of border pieces that are distinguishable, easy to pick out in the cluttered mess of colour and shapes. These are the pieces that contain information on country of origin or family names and while they provide the structural integrity of the puzzle, without the inner pieces the picture remains incomplete. What comes next is significantly harder – the filling in, the culmination of little details that when linked together allow us to see the whole image. We shift and twist one piece at a time, thinking it will be the match only to place it back amongst the other pieces, judiciously making another selection, hoping it might be the right fit. The process takes time and while sometimes students felt challenged with this assignment, I feel the meanings and connections they were uncovering served as encouragement to persevere. Some students may construct their puzzles with similar pieces, commonalities in size, shape and colour and yet in the end each will be unique. Jordan contextualized the importance of this personal investigation when she expressed, "I think it's valuable because you kind of have to know about your family and your roots. If you can kind of get a grasp on who your family is and who you are, you can get a grasp on everyone else and that part of it" (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). Jordan's words resonate with Bateson's (2000) belief, expressed earlier, that wisdom "is born of the overlapping of lives, the resonance of stories" (p. 243).

As we undertook this work together, I came to see how I, as a teacher could help students explore their roots in a way that contributed to enhanced feelings of stability and an enriched sense of self. By stepping away from some of the typical ways that family, kinship and relations

are presented in schools and by finding new ways that are rooted in the personal and the experiential, students began to see themselves as connected to the past, to others, and to the future. I am able to draw connections between my research and what Greene (1995) deemed, "our obligation … to find ways of enabling the young to find their voices, to open their spaces, to reclaim their histories in all their variety and discontinuity" (p. 120). Our use of literature in the Roots Project gave us entry points into rich discussions of rootedness and identity.

In the short story *Borders* (King, 1993), as the customs agents force the mother and son to declare their citizenship, the mother proudly announces she is Blackfoot and refuses further classification. Eventually the agent tells her, "I'd be proud of being Blackfoot if I were Blackfoot. But you have to be American or Canadian" (p. 139). At a time when young students are engaged in a constant process of creating, revising, and formulating their identity and sense of self, discussion of a novel such as *Borders* supports and affirms their developing identities rather than places limitations on their understandings or forces them to subscribe to either/or binaries:. "The material of history and tradition is so rich, why not play with it for the building of identity and exploration of difference" (Bateson, 2000, p. 170). In this exploration of difference, there is also room to invite student choice and perspective. As Jordan reminds us, "If I can connect with it somehow, in any sort of way, then I know I wouldn't zone out because I just think I'd enjoy it more" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). As a teacher, then, it is up to me to find ways to make the material of history personal, to draw parallels between the curriculum and the lived experiences of students, and in doing so welcome and encourage the connections the students make.

I think once again of that day in the staff room, naively thinking I could keep my family connections anonymous in a small prairie town, all the while clinging to the fact that I was not

yet ready to share without first having the opportunity to negotiate where I fit into the Lindsay family. I doubt I will forget the untimely questioning that preceded the relationships established with my family. “As educators we support the crafting of fairy tales when we ask students to provide personal information that is uncomfortable to share or that they simply do not have” (Miller Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2010, p. 100) and, in my case, I was the awkward, scrambling student pretending this place, these people, and their stories had always been a part of me. If I was to stand in the same place today, I doubt I would experience the same reservations I felt that day. As Lindsey and Parsons (2010) write, “Just as families can be separated they can be created. Some re-formations of family are purposeful while others evolve naturally” (p. 60). I have come to treasure the evolution of those relationships, and what they mean to us as individuals as well as to our extended family as a whole. The Lindsay family’s own stories, alongside the ones we write together, strengthen my own roots and as these roots grow and intertwine, they fill voids I was not even aware existed. This experience serves as a personal reminder that there is always room for new roots to grow. It was through my experiences with Auntie Martha – driving her to her Scrabble games at the local seniors’ center and taking the requested scenic route home, giving us time to grapple over life’s dilemmas like, “What is a person to do when one gets the Q, Z and X all at the same time?”; evening conversations over tea talking about just how much teaching had changed from when she started out in the profession – that the foundation of our relationship was built.

Across The Generations: Elizabeth and her Great Grandma Learn Together

For Elizabeth, with her love of people and their stories, the Roots assignment was an invitation to do what she enjoys: talk, listen, and learn. When we first spoke of the assignment

she immediately knew that she wanted to ground her project in the stories shared with her by her Great Grandma.

Multigenerational Learning: The Art of Speaking and Listening

As we engaged in the Roots project, our teaching team encouraged our students to start talking with their family members and relations, to ask questions, to sit in conversation and to really listen. While this process was already natural for Elizabeth outside of school, it became key to her experiences within the bounds of school as well.

> When we understand our lives we do so in narrative form, and clearly, our stories while different are none the less connected by the same need to make sense, to make meaning, to find a direction. To help the diverse students we know articulate their stories is not only to help them pursue meanings of their lives – to find out how things are happening and to keep posing questions about the why. (Greene, 1995, p. 165)

Elizabeth was able to articulate this same message herself when we spoke of learning through conversation. She told me, “It’s a better learning because it teaches you more than just the information … you get so much more by asking people and interviewing them and just find out more verbally” (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Elizabeth understands that “listening is a gift” (Cameron, 2012, Cultivating Narrative Intelligence). This gift takes practice and patience. As we use it more and more in meaningful interactions such as the intergenerational conversations Elizabeth and her Great Grandma were engaged in, it has the potential to become a cultivated skill that will enable students to harvest many rewards as they move through the curriculum and as they move through their lives.

The chance to connect with and be a part of Elizabeth’s schooling was also significant for her Great Grandma. In this process there was an opportunity for Elizabeth’s Great Grandma to

reflect on her lived experiences and to continue to make sense of them as she passed them on. Elizabeth told me her Great Grandma was very excited about the project and was eager to share their family history book with her. Alongside the formalities of the assignment was an invitation to share knowledge and wisdom in an authentic manner and in a way that was valued because "it's not busy talk or anything. It's conversation and dialogue and reality" (Helen, Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). I imagine Elizabeth and her Great Grandma sitting together with the family history book open on their laps, the same way I have done with my own grandparents, aunts and uncles. I picture Elizabeth asking questions that might prompt certain recollections or stories or perhaps just sitting quietly, the ready and willing recipient of whatever is on her Great Grandmother's mind at the time. Bateson (2000) reminds us that "we need to start the process of passing on whatever we can, knowledge or property or keepsakes, while it still has value" (p. 224). While the family history book is a tangible object that Elizabeth and her family will treasure for years to come, having her Great Grandmother narrate photo captions and share experiences with her is invaluable. During one of our class conversations about the assignment, Helen told the students, "Just by asking questions you make your family that much stronger" (Field note, October 15, 2012). Although sharing a special connection that preceded the project, Elizabeth did tell me, "I think it's bonding us even more because I'm learning more about her and when she was a child and I just have more respect for her that way knowing all about her now" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). It is through this multigenerational learning students become awake to their place in history.

> A reflective grasp on our life stories and of our ongoing quests, that reaches beyond where we have been, depends on our ability to remember things past. It is against the

backdrop of those remembered things and the funded meanings to which they gave rise, that we grasp and understand what is now going on around us. (Greene, 1995, p. 20)

Again, this speaks to Elizabeth's understandings of roots, the envisioning of lives on a continuum, and to how she sees herself within society in present time. She proudly told me, "I came from somewhere [and] I can learn from what they did and make it better. So when my great-great-grandkids are looking at my history they'll be, like, 'Whoa, she really changed stuff and now we have a better and brighter future'" (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012).

To Elizabeth, being rooted is synonymous with confidence, to an understanding of her surroundings and who she is. By her own definition, Elizabeth is rooted. I loved listening to her recount conversations with her Great Grandma and I felt truly privileged to witness her emerging understandings about history, family, and the power of story. Elizabeth's project reminded me that "arguably we should see the nuclear family not as the ideal family life but as a bare and fragile minimum" (Bateson, 2000, p. 75) as we reach beyond and foster connections with our extended family and relations.

Elizabeth's beautiful and deeply personal learning caused me to reflect on how much I have learned from conversations with my family members as well. It prompted me to wonder why none of that wisdom and knowledge was ever invited into, represented, or validated in the course of my schooling. Bateson (2000) wrote, "Learning is short circuited when age groups are segregated as they are by schools and retirement communities, eliminating the chance to use age as a model for understanding kinds of difference" (p. 10). From what I have seen with the Roots project, I would argue using variance in age to provide depth and breadth of opinion and the sharing of life experiences is a contributing factor in the development of strong communities. Ken Robinson jokes, "We still educate children by batches. We put them through the system by

age group. Why do we do that? Why is there this assumption that the most important thing kids have in common is how old they are? It's like the most important thing about them is their date of manufacture" (2010, Changing Education Paradigms). While the segregation of students by age is problematic, it becomes even more questionable when students are separated from adults, seniors and elders who have much to contribute to their education. Society is not structured in such a way that you only interact with those born in the same year as you. Meaningful mentoring and learning take all forms in the real multigenerational communities in which students reside. Helen urged, "That's one of the connections that we should do in education on a regular basis is be connected with adults, elders, and seniors" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). In every community there is potential; there are people who are ready and willing to share if only given the opportunity.

People as Resources: A Community of All Ages

To truly connect and share, person to person, is a powerful experience. Elizabeth identified with the characters in *Borders* recognizing similar methods of transmission of story used by the mother in the story and her own Great Grandma. In the story, King (1993) writes, "my mother told me all sorts of stories. She was serious about it, too. She'd tell me them slow, repeating parts as she went, as if she expected me to remember each one" (p. 142). Elizabeth paralleled King as she grinned and described the intentional sharing by her Great Grandma. "She sometimes repeats stuff" Elizabeth told me, "Like really important stuff she repeats a couple times and lets it sink in and she talks slower at important parts when she wants me to remember to tell it to other people" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). Norma Cameron, a writer and storyteller, tells us that when we pass along a story "the person we heard

it from stands behind us" (2012, Cultivating Narrative Intelligence) further strengthening and preserving the connections made while broadening our connections as a community.

In the absence of these exchanges there is a loss on both sides: the teller loses the opportunity to contribute and have their stories validated and the listener the chance to understand; the ability to connect evades both. When this happens "people are denied a meaningful context in which to function. They lose the sense of continuity and place that comes with attachments to long-standing collective memories and meanings" (Gross, 1992, p. 62). By bringing these topics into classroom dialogue, students are encouraged to be aware and to attend to their families in ways they may have otherwise. Elizabeth's Great Grandma is committed to helping Elizabeth connect with her roots and continue their family story. Elizabeth told me with a laugh, "If I don't ask her she'll tell me anyway" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). In both Thomas King's short story and Elizabeth's experiences with her Great Grandma, the people are the primary resources. They have rich and meaningful stories to share and, in doing so, inspire the kind of transformative learning that could never be rivaled by a textbook or website.

Smith and Sobel (2010) wrote, "In communities where citizens engage in cross generational conversations and projects the simple opportunity to interact with one another can similarly induce the experience of mutuality and support that lie at the heart of humanities common life with one another" (pp. 99-100). The notion of cross generational conversation, and viewing people as resources for learning, extends beyond seniors and elders; a true cross generational community includes people of all ages. Multi-age learning does take place in schools but in many regards it's limited to the spectrum of grades learning alongside one another in any given building and often occurs in contrived ways. Initiatives like Care Partners enable

older students to build relationships with younger students through games, projects and mentoring. The Roots of Empathy program invites a mother and baby to be a part of the classroom, providing students with the opportunity to witness the growth and development of the child over the course of the year. There is much that could be done to create more authentic multigenerational learning communities; although these are key foundation pieces it beckons for extension and expansion.

When all members of the community are effectively engaged in sharing perspectives and experiences "you'll end up with a rich tapestry of interpretations that are much more interesting than any single one" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 39). This process is essential because "whatever we know, it is not sufficient. We can't see enough of the whole. We can't figure it out alone. Somebody sees something that the rest of us might need" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 34). To do this we need to come together and create an environment where every voice is heard and respected.

Multiple Accents and Hats: Myles Reminds of the Many Roles Students Play

Myles was not as certain as Elizabeth when we began our journey with the Roots project. He wavered between potential topics and priorities of assignments before choosing to focus on the story of his Mom's immigration to Canada. The fact that his Mom unconsciously assumes her English accent around Myles' grandparents often arose in our conversations; Myles would muse that as soon as she picked up the phone her voice would change – a little mystery that seemed to signify a deep connection. He himself claims he has no ability to adopt or mimic the accent despite being around them on a regular basis. The decision Myles made to focus on the immigration story and timeline hinged on the fact that had his Mom not come to Canada she would have never met his Dad and his own story would have never begun.

Milieu

It was not unusual for Myles and me to get talking and, in getting caught up in our thoughts, veer off into unrelated topics covering everything from Greek mythology to classical music to New Guinea. Although Myles certainly contributed to the dialogue and would always answer any questions posed and respond to any thoughts I had, he rarely took his explorations and explanations any further than he needed to after making his point. I often felt that I did more than my share of the talking to move the conversation forward. To my surprise, one day Myles began telling me about one of his many childhood homes his family resided in. With the vivid details he selected to share I felt that I was there.

> It was on top of a general foods store, Henry's Food Store, and it had a rock garden and stairs climbed up the side and it had a table with an umbrella over it outside, a yellow door and it was fairly small. We had a closet that my Dad could climb in and push himself against the wall and stay there. That's how we played hide and seek… because my Dad was a ninja… he's old now though. (Recorded conversation, October 26, 2012)

In those moments, we were not in school. Myles took me with him and transported us to the family home on top of Henry's Food Store. I was able to glimpse his life as a son and brother; the student that I knew him best as was not part of this equation. For me this was a reminder that our students come to us with storylines already in process (Pushor, 2010) and it was a reminder of the multiplicity of roles that Myles plays at both home and school. The delight that shone in Myles eyes as he relished in the memories of the home, and antics of his Dad, conveyed to me just how much those games meant to him and how they had shaped him and his subsequent understanding of family.

Curriculum theorist, Joseph Schwab, saw curriculum as comprised of four commonplaces: "teacher, student, what is taught, and milieu of teaching-learning" (Schwab, 1983, p. 241). In the broadest sense I take milieu to mean all of the social, emotional and environmental contexts that contribute to how a student is situated. In his definition of milieu, Schwab (1973) includes school, classroom, family and community and notes that these milieus serve to create additional, equally relevant milieus through the "interplay of one milieu upon another" (p. 503). Schwab articulates that "learners are not only minds or knowers but bundles of affects, individuals, personalities, earners of livings. They are not only group interactors but possessors of private lives" (Schwab, 2004, p. 128. Unfortunately, schools and curriculum attend only superficially to any milieus outside of the classroom and school as is exemplified by my conversations with Myles. He has very real connections and experiences that contribute to the way he knows and understand family. The importance of family milieu is shown in Myles description of how he communicates with his grandparents. "I try to use things like 'thing-a-ma.' My grandparents are old and so they don't remember what most things are … When [my Grandma] forgets something she'll say 'pass me the do-dad' instead of what it is so I try and talk like that" (Recorded conversation, October 19, 2012). This exemplifies that the "relevant milieus [in students' lives] are manifold, nesting one within another like Chinese boxes" (Schwab, 1973, p. 503). As Myles negotiates the roles of son, grandson, brother, and nephew simultaneously within the context of his family, these roles are also influencing his position as a student.

Families in Transition

As a member of a family who recently transitioned into two households, the roles Myles plays in his home life have become more complex. He continues to adapt to the respective

differences and similarities between the weeks spent at his Dad's and the weeks spent at his Mom's, rotating every Sunday. The physical restructuring of the home has also led to the renegotiation of some social and emotional frameworks as well. It would be naïve not to acknowledge the reverberations this change have caused and are causing in Myles' day to day life. It is important to acknowledge that "all [students'] families are or will be in the midst of changing family dynamics at some point throughout the school year" (Rieger, 2008, p. 70). I was troubled by knowing that his classroom teachers were not privy to these understandings of Myles' life as a son and a brother; this information may have given them a more complete student profile and provided them with the opportunity to attend to him in a more conscious way.

The home that Myles is living in for a particular week shapes his routines and schedules, from his transportation route to school to dinner table rules. Having chatted a little bit about after school activities and about the difference between the "home" Myles and the "school" Myles, Myles expressed that the only notable character change was that the vocabulary he selects to express himself is less restricted in the latter context. He spoke about what happens at dinner time in his two homes. Myles, along with his three siblings, are to completely "unplug" during dinner at his Dad's house meaning all computers and video games are turned off. What results are conversations about everything and nothing: "People can leave but they don't have anything else to do because we're told no electronics" (Recorded conversation, October 26, 2012). The ban on electronics is in place until the last family member has finished their meal. This is not as much of an issue at his Mom's because "there's no electronics at my Mom's" (Recorded conversation, October 26, 2012). The temptation of computers and video games does not serve to interfere with dinner because they are not physically present in the home. Myles' role as a son and a brother are shaped by interactions with siblings, parents and environment.

During this transition, both in the restructuring of family practices and weekly rotations, there are also implications for Myles as a student. As we were catching up on the status of his Roots project one afternoon, Myles told me it was complicated by access to a computer because the only computer in the home at his mom's is her work laptop "so that might have to wait until Sunday [when I get to my dad's] and then get it all done in crunch time. And if it's a day late I'll explain I didn't have access to a computer to Jeffrey [teacher]" (Recorded conversation, October 19, 2012). Here again, Myles reminds me that our students have lives happening outside of school. Unless as teachers we know the lives of our students, there are complications and factors that have substantial implications for the students' schoolwork or performance that we may be unaware of.

Elements of transition are not solely reserved for families who experience physical separation. Through learning and growth individuals change and evolve, formulating new identities and ideologies that influence their role within, and place among, the family. This may result in the adoption of new ways of being in relation with one another. Just as families are diverse, they are also always changing and adapting and "it is their stories about their changing lives and experience that will hold us together and drive the curriculum" (Reiger, 2008, p. 70).

"My Assignment is Kind of Different": Jordan's Introspective Journey

Jordan's experience with the assignment reinforces the necessity of openness, acceptance and support of diversity and difference not only in the parameters of the assignments given in classrooms but in the broader learning community as well. I will admit that I worried about Jordan initially; concerned about potential anxiety or distress she might endure because of her perception of the assignment and her struggle to solidify an approach, combined with her role as a student participant in my research. Jordan immediately acknowledged that her assignment

might be a little different than some of her peers. Although we never openly discussed it, Jordan alluded to encounters with family themed assignments in the past. In the letter to all the family members she has never met, including biological and adoptive family members on her maternal side, which she crafted as the product of her Roots research, she wrote, "It's a challenge though sometimes, because how am I supposed to do projects at school that have to do with my family's roots?" (Written assignment for the Roots project) and this seemed to weigh heavy on her mind. Rather than taking a research approach, she engaged in a process of self-reflection and tackled challenging questions about her family for which she does not know the answers. Jordan admitted it was not something she had spent time thinking about prior to the assignment, "I haven't really thought too deeply about my own roots because I've kind of just gone with it, like how my life's played out, but it's making me think a little more about it and my connection to my family, or the family that I have" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). This assignment became something that Jordan carried with her as she moved between home and school in an ongoing process of reflection over the course of the unit.

Hegemonic Notions of Family & Othering

It would be superficial to ignore the social constructs that brought Jordan to a place where she feels her family does not fit. Jordan lives with her mom and together they do not maintain contact with either her mom's adopted or her biological family. As a healthy and successful young woman, it is evident that Jordan's needs are met by her current family situation. Unfortunately, despite this, Jordan's family dynamics make her vulnerable to stereotypes and judgments; more specifically she is rendered defenseless against hegemonic notions of family. A hegemonic construction results "when one group or type seem to be implicitly better than another" and so then "family hegemony is the cultural power of the 'ideal' family construct"

(Heilman, 2008, pp. 9-10). Gillis (in Heilman, 2008) further explains that "we all live in two families. One is our actual family we live *with* and the other is this ideal hegemonic family that we live *by*, or in comparison with" (p. 11). The family that Jordan lives with is her mom; however, the family that Jordan lives by is the nuclear family with two parents, siblings, and the extended relatives that are present for celebrations and special occasions.

It was apparent to me right away that Jordan was very conscious of the perception of her family situation when she repeatedly referred to her assignment as "different." It is important to note that Jordan was not the only student in the room who identified their project as being "different" due to personal circumstance. The students' awareness of how their family might be viewed by others also seemed to impact how they regarded their own families. Heilman (2008) explains, "Hegemonies of family can create negative self-judgments in the same way that other stereotypes do. Thus it is not just others who make these judgments but the family members themselves" (p. 11). All of these students who felt apprehensive are affected by the notion of othering. Madrid (in Turner-Vorbeck & Miller Marsh, 2008) explores and defines othering as follows:

> Being the *other* means feeling different; is an awareness of being distinct; is consciousness of being dissimilar. It means being outside the game, outside the circle, outside the set. It means being on the edges, on the margins, on the periphery. Otherness means feeling excluded, closed out, precluded, even disdained and scorned. It produces a sense of isolation, of apartness, or disconnectedness, of alienation. (p. 2)

These are heavy feelings for our students to be carrying. I asked Jordan if it would be good for a class to have a general understanding of what each other's families look like, should they be comfortable sharing that information, and she responded:

> I think so because there'd be less of a judgmental environment because you don't know if some girl in your class doesn't have a dad, or is adopted, and that doesn't change who they are because they are still going to be the same person whether they have a father or not but it would help to stay away from the situation or making it awkward. (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012)

Jordan expressed some frustrations and confided that the most challenging element of the assignment was "the fact that nothing got answered for me, well some things got answered, like in the thought process, but none of my questions are going to get answered" (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). Of conversations with peers Jordan told me, "It got weird because people would be like 'I learned this about my Grandparents' or 'I found out I was a part of Saskatchewan history' and I'm just asking these questions like 'Who is my family?' It was just weird for me I guess" (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). In her emotive letter to the family members she does not know she wrote:

> It would be nice if you had at least left a book or journal or even records explaining something, but it's okay because I understand if you were going through something. Maybe we had relatives fighting for our freedom in a war. Even with all that though, I think you owe me the chance to answer my burning questions.

As teachers we were unable to help Jordan find the answers that she was looking for but we were able to provide an environment that was supportive of her situation, and the distinct situations and dynamics of all 30 of our students. When we developed the assignment, our intent was to engage students in a process of self-discovery and reflection, not an exercise in collecting dates and names. We wanted every student to tailor their own project in a way that made sense to

them and their family composition and history. In the end, all thirty projects were as unique as the students who created them.

Jordan was able to overcome her feelings of difference and abstain from letting them monopolize the experience or manifest themselves as misfortune. During the initial student work period that followed the introduction of the assignment, Jordan and I took a few minutes together in a semi-private corner of the computer lab. Initially she was unsure of how to approach the assignment. Knowing she has Ukrainian ancestry she had considered taking a universal approach to the experiences of that cultural group in Canada. As we spoke, and I heard the concerns that Jordan was expressing about her family structure and how she felt it did not lend itself to the assignment, we decided together that perhaps an open ended letter that would enable her to focus on asking questions rather than finding answers might be one approach. She was quick to adopt this format for her assignment, liking the element of freedom and creativity that would accompany it. It also provided a more personal connection with which to be involved, as compared to a general inquiry into Ukrainian history in Canada. As we sat talking, I sketched a possible framework on the piece of paper on the table between us, as I do often when trying to ensure my ideas and intentions are being communicated clearly. Once we were both feeling confident about her assignment, Jordan tucked the paper into her binder. Jordan then posed the questions she had about the formalities of the assignment, many of which focused on the academic elements, wanting to know about how hers would be graded against her peers who would be providing findings from their research. During our recorded conversations, Jordan told me she was talking to her mom about it and it was never far from her mind; it was obvious that Jordan was dedicated to her assignment and the resulting personal learning and growth.

I feel it is important to note that Jordan was not the only student who found it valuable to sit down one on one with a teacher, be it Jeffrey, Sarah or me, and talk about how their own unique situations were being applied to the project. As a community of learners, we were being "called to confront the fact that 'what everybody knows' is all too often not what everybody knows" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 7) as we took time to explore each other's individual understandings and situation.

When I asked Jordan what she liked most about the project at the end of her journey she clearly articulated, "The thought process to write that letter. What I had to go through… Learning about myself; that's what I liked most about it" (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). Jordan's strong sense of self shone through both in the process of her work and in the product she created. Jordan could not detach herself from her assignment and told me that she often found herself thinking about it outside of school; that she was "always kind of thinking about it" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). Jordan explained, "I'm pretty into it. Like I'm not tuning out because it's more personal" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). From this "it seems clear that the more continuous and authentic personal encounters can be, the less likely it will be that categorizing and distancing take place" (Greene, 1995, p. 155).For Jordan this was most definitely the case. She never ceased to amaze me with her insights, reminding me just how much youth are capable of when we challenge them and encourage them to make their own connections within a framework that is contextualized and co-constructed in a way that takes into account individual learners. I asked Jordan what she thought she would take away from the Roots project. I chose to keep the question broad, not focusing it on social or academic elements, curious to see where Jordan might place her priorities and where her head and heart were at. While Jordan could not communicate specific lessons she would take from

the experience, she was assertive in saying, "I just know I'll take things out" (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). An air of confidence about her family situation began to build around Jordan during our time together and, although there were tensions at the beginning, Jordan's personal growth and realizations were astounding as she brought her project full circle.

Embracing Multiple Family Forms

From her uncertain beginnings and initial apprehensions emerged a more confident and self-assured young woman who is awake to her own surroundings and how they impact and influence her. Jordan closed her letter to the family she does not know with the following statement:

> Family isn't just about having three siblings, a grandma, twenty cousins and four aunts. It's about just having at least one parent figure that loves and cares for me. What made me think that way? You guys did. Not having you in my life has made me realize that it's okay to not have the stereotypical mom, dad, brother, and sister white picket fence family. So, I guess I'd like to say thank you for helping me to be the person I am today. I know I didn't realize that you had done so much until now, but honestly you have made an impact on my life… This letter has made me realize that there's more meaning to the word family and it may not be the same for everyone.

This thoughtful and empathetic articulation of Jordan's learning about conceptualizations of family, hers in particular, are hard to capture as a specified outcome in a curriculum document. The implications of this understanding will stay with Jordan her entire lifetime. Such an understanding will also enable her to relate to others in her community and our broader society in a gracious and accepting manner.

Often it seems that administrators and educators "ignore the possibility that students might have pressing cares and interests not addressed by the subject matter presented in schools" (Noddings, 2005, p. 7). Although teachers are unable to provide Jordan with the answers she is seeking about her roots, they are able to facilitate a process and create a space for her exploration, growth and development in a safe and educative environment. It seems unreasonable to expect students to be able to maintain focus on topics and subject matter for which they are unable to connect and or to find relevance within. How can we as teachers re-envision our work with subject matter such as social studies in ways that center the issues and concerns impacting students, and that use their perceptions of the world, as our starting place for curriculum making?

The Things That Are Left Unsaid

Aoki (2005) wrote, "The principle of legitimacy of narratives … boils down to 'who says what stories count and don't count" (p. 207) and consequently this influences whose story gets told and who sits in silence. For some students what was of particular interest were the things that were left unsaid by their families thereby leaving their imaginations to wonder about what stories were behind the locks and where the missing keys might be hidden to release these stories. A student struggling to find direction for her project smiled at Jeffrey's suggested title, "My Grandma is Prussian, My Grandpa is Jewish, My Other Grandpa is Lithuanian but No One Wants to Talk About it and Everyone Else is Dead" (Field note, October 10, 2012). Myles and Elizabeth both noted similar undercurrents in the conversations that they had, or did not have, with their relatives. When I asked Myles if he knew why his Mom's family chose to immigrate to Canada he responded, "No, I haven't actually asked because I wasn't sure if it was a touchy subject or not" (Recorded conversation, October 19, 2012). He then speculated that perhaps it was in the name of some kind of opportunity, like a job. In response to her questions about her

Great Great Grandmother, Elizabeth said, “She found that kind of hard to talk about so I never got that much information out of her but I got enough” (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). Freeman (2000) addresses these missing pieces when she writes, “The psychic history of each family is embedded in both what is said and what is left unsaid; what is not talked about, repeated, or passed down can be as important, even more important, than what we are conscious of” (p. xvii). This disconnect becomes even more complicated and engrained when family stories, those told and untold, are not accepted in classrooms or articulated in curriculum documents as valid ways of knowing.

Selection and legitimization of content and process that result from curricular mandates at provincial, divisional and school levels seem impossible to separate from the current school landscape. There are conscious decisions made about what to include and what to exclude in school, not only in a curricular sense but also in regard to social and political considerations as influenced by the ideology of the political party that presides over educational affairs at a given time. Consequences of these omissions, intentional or otherwise, have lasting implications. Two types of curriculum that have lasting impacts on learning communities are the unacknowledged null and hidden curricula. Null curriculum is comprised of all that we do not teach, such as notions of family in which the family structure includes same gender parents or families which are blended or of mixed-race. Hidden curriculum is the implicit transmission of values or norms through practices such as requiring parents to provide a rationale for student lates or absences or to check in at the office when they enter the school. “The null curriculum and the hidden curriculum affect students forever; whereas students often forget the overt curriculum shortly after they complete their proficiency tests” (Goodson, in Vorbeck, 2008, p. 181). The uniformity in the textbooks that Goodlad (2004) writes about serves to privilege and reinforce certain

perspectives while fostering and further entrenching damaging stereotypes. "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story" (Adichie, Danger of a Single Story). Throughout this process, as a teaching team we wanted the students to be open to multiple understandings and voices and we felt that we were able to accomplish that. As Jeffrey reflected, "They were able to connect that even people who weren't written about in history books still have meaningful history, and they got that" (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012). In getting this, they were engaged in what Adichie calls the rejection of the single story and "when we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise" (Danger of a Single Story). Students were able to reach beyond the classic tales of the past and find their own tales as they deciphered "history, herstory, and whostory" (Tasha Altman, personal communication, January 26, 2013).

It Is Worth the Struggle?

There were moments on this journey when I worried, both as a teacher and researcher. The personal and family element of the lives of the majority of our students has been ignored on the school landscape, to varying degrees, throughout their educational experiences and, in some ways, this did pose challenges to students and teachers alike during this research. As Sarah explained:

> We are trying to take things in a different direction in that we want them to make connections to themselves because a lot of times they have difficulty putting themselves in their assignments or even using first person perspective. We want to know their opinions. We want to know their thoughts and we don't just want some expository piece

of writing that's from the third person perspective. (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012)

As Jeffrey, Sarah and I sat to talk about the assignment one day, seemingly more friends than colleagues, Jeffrey chimed in, "I think bottom line we just wish that some of them would have connected their history a little bit more with their own comments and insights with how their lives are affected and what the story means to them" (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012). It will take a deliberate and concentrated effort to re-connect families and communities with curriculum in a meaningful way. Miller Marsh and Turner-Vorbeck (2010) write, "If we as adults truly believe that all children have the potential to craft strong, positive self-identities, then we must reach out to the members of the diverse families present in our classrooms and communities and integrate them into our curricula" (p. 105). In doing so, we provide space for the individual lives of our students but we also "make space in our classrooms for all those who accompany them" (Pushor, 2010, p. 7). As we reach out and create such spaces, we develop a learning community that encourages and honors a chorus of voices and blends together a plethora of opinions and perspectives. We no longer present a curriculum to students which invites a single story and which ignores their own stories. We no longer present a curriculum to students which ignores the null and hidden aspects of that curriculum.

The Roots assignment proved true that "the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is the one in which teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation" (Greene, 1995, p. 23). It was powerful to watch as the 30 students, all with unique tales and teachings to share, updated their classmates on their progress and shared their latest findings. The students owned the stories; there was no one else that could tell them the way they did. Our

stories become us; they shift and shape how we see the world around us and our role within it. Surprisingly enough, the more diverse the findings and stories the closer we became as a community. This serves as a critical reminder for all educators that "the living other is more important than any theory" (Noddings, 2005, p. xviii) – or curricular outcome for that matter.

In the notes Auntie Martha would leave on the counter to wish me a good day or request I pick up a carton of milk on my way home she would always change, add, or delete one letter from my name. She knew there was one letter that served to differentiate my name from hers but she was never quite sure just which one it was. In the beginning, the name, my given and her married, with an e substituted for an a, was the only thing that tied us together. Now, after living together and sharing our lives for a period of time, what matters is she and I, great aunt and niece – teachers.

Chapter Four: Implications for Teaching Social Studies

There are many facts and dates from my years as a social studies student that, despite my best efforts, I am simply unable to recall. When I dust off the memories I can faintly see a list, in chronological order, of the years the provinces joined Confederation. Names of the provinces and territories are shrouded in a haze making them illegible. I am sure we carefully and deliberately examined these dates along with the legacy of responsible government in our study of Canada. I know that I once committed this information to memory, even if it was fleeting or simply to achieve a reputable grade on an exam as any conscientious student would. Fortunately I do not hinge my understanding of citizenship on the ability to recall national trivia but rather on the contributions I make to my community through my thoughts and actions. In another memory I can hear a voice serenading, “In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue.” But do not ask me what port he sailed from, the length of the journey, or any other related detail because I do not know. To be honest, I’m not even completely sure this rhyme is even from my own repertoire of experiences. In fact, it might even be the familiar voice of my Grandma, reminiscing about her school days, reciting the melody. It seems that this may be one example of those trivial dates, rendered nearly meaningless in our time and lacking contextualization, which must be committed to memory for examination purposes. It is just as Jordan described, “You’re just kind of taking these notes of a bunch of numbers and you’re not actually getting to know like Christopher Columbus” (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). Maybe if I had gotten to know him more, it might have meant more; a more in depth exploration of human action and consequence? Maybe it is the catchy melody that ensures this fact meets a friendlier fate than other long forgotten content such as the order the provinces joined Confederation. Or maybe it is nothing

more than a universal student experience for "much of what is offered in schools is promptly forgotten and this is true at every level" (Noddings, 2006, p. 23).

I would never fault Mr. Hollings, or any of my other teachers, for my inability to retain the facts and dates outlined in the mandated curriculum. At the same time, I doubt that they expected me to hang onto those details for this long. That is not to say I am without very rich and memorable school experiences; there are things that I do remember and I am aware of their reverberations in my everyday life. In my Grade 12 year, at the time of a provincial election, our class hosted an all party candidates forum in the gymnasium of our school. We planned, invited, organized, and welcomed the candidates, students, and interested members of the community to our event. While Mr. Hollings guided us through the process, the decisions and actions were left to our class; we were even responsible for developing the questions that we would like to ask the candidates based on the issues that mattered the most to us. Following that experience, I have been more inclined to keep myself informed about political issues and events and I'm not intimidated to attend events of this nature. In a Grade 8 class, I remember being encouraged to pick a topic related to Remembrance Day and write a composition. Given the freedom to make content and stylistic choices I decided to craft a piece about the experiences of my Uncle Ossie during World War II. I remember sitting on the couch in the formal living room one night, the place for serious phone conversations because of its partial separation from the noisy kitchen and family room, pen and clipboard in hand, writing frantically as Uncle Ossie narrated his journey. He told amazing tales about transporting civilians to the next town, or wherever they needed to get to, in spite of orders not to. Of his landing on the beach and seeing his first dead soldier, first dead body period, he told me he had wondered, "What a peculiar place to take a nap," before his new reality took hold. Without being encouraged to ask, to take the initiative and explore what

was important to me, and have my findings validated by my teachers, I am not convinced I would have learned these things on my own. Yet they mean so much to me that I cannot imagine not knowing. It feels that these experiences are unnecessarily few. How might curriculum and school be reexamined in this light?

Curriculum

When I alter my approach and come to these recollections and wonderings from the perspective of a teacher, rather than a student, there are distinct parallels. It is not specific elements in a curriculum document so much as it is moments when we are truly connecting person to person that matter most; the incorporation of authentic pieces of our lives that blend into classroom learning as it unfolds. We cannot ignore that "who the teacher is, who the students are, what they are trying to accomplish separately and together all matter in designing instruction" (Noddings, 2006, p. 8). The interactions not marred by desks such as morning greetings in the hallway, interruptions that lead to jokes and laughter, even chance meetings in the grocery store let us see each other for who we truly are. My experiences as a teacher and my philosophical approach to education are seemingly more complex than the students' understandings. I am distinctly aware of my own evolution of thoughts based on the combination of lived experiences, as student and as teacher, that have provided me the opportunity to explore multiple ways of knowing and from this emerges my own personal tensions.

I am thankful to have enjoyed moments of true self-reflection and learning in my school experience. There is a universal thread that connects these experiences in a very significant way. Embedded within these assignments was the chance to explore and connect the curriculum to my own personal learning, to make connections to the world around me. I think about Myles,

Elizabeth, and Jordan and even though they were able to articulate that they craved relevance, I am not convinced that they initially recognized the connection between relevance and the personalization of learning that serves to further fuel their interests. Eisner (2009) wrote, "An unexamined belief in curriculum as in other domains of human activity can easily become dogma which in fact my hinder the very functions the concept was originally designed to serve" (p. 107). Unfortunately this seems to be the case with the Social Studies curriculum.

Joseph Schwab (2009) stated that "a defensible curriculum or plan of curriculum must be one which somehow takes account of all these subsubjects which pertain to man. It cannot take only one and ignore the others; it cannot even take account of many of them and ignore one" (p. 128). There are many topics that are discounted in Social Studies curriculums, and subsequently, classrooms. Unfortunately they are often the ones with the greatest humanistic elements and connections; as a result of being discounted the subject areas remain dry and impersonal. As we witnessed during the Roots project teachers and students were able to breathe life back into the curriculum where it otherwise may not exist by inviting personal accounts of teachers, students and their families into the classroom.

In addition to the selective curricular content, another complication is that "curriculum is not the same for all students of a given age and standing. Nor does it differ necessarily in all respects for each and every student or school" (Schwab, 1983, p. 240). During my time with the Community Education cohort I began to formulate a deeper understanding of what diversity looks like in the classroom. I know there are times when I have been guilty of looking at a group of students and making assumptions about shared experiences. In slowing down and really getting to know Myles, Elizabeth, Jordan and their peers, it has changed the way I view classroom dynamics. All students are going to approach the curriculum with a different lens and

come to different understandings as a result of the innumerable variables that shaped their own personal experiences including, but not limited to, diversity in family forms, cultural and religious beliefs, or connection to place.

What is the Purpose of School?

During my time with Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan I felt that I was holding a knotted ball of yarn with three tails, each representing the lived experiences of one of the three student research participants. All the threads emerged from separate places and then disappeared deep into the clutter. It was my task to attempt to carefully trace the individual threads, begin to unwind and, in doing so, make sense of their individual stories in relation to their school experiences with Social Studies. As we spoke together, shared understandings, and I walked alongside the students in our daily classroom life, the ball seemed to be ever loosening. However there were times when I would make gains in unwinding the ball only to find the direct consequence was the tightening of another knot in another place. In my attempts to untangle and make sense of the mess, there was one knot in particular that kept building. I chose to ignore it, turning the ball in my hands so as to position it in a way that I would not see it. Making the conscious effort not to attend to it only caused it to grow. I was hesitant to approach this new twisted web that was forming because I had a feeling that perhaps I wasn't simply unraveling "Social Studies," perhaps this was something much bigger. When avoidance was no longer an option, I allowed myself to consider the following questions: If school itself is not perceived as relevant, how could content and subject matter possibly be deemed so? Is the problem instead the larger educational paradigm? What is the students' understanding or perception of the institution to which they are required to devote a large portion of their day?

When I walk down the halls in high schools like Peggy McKercher Collegiate Institute, I cannot help but wonder what the building, the teachers, and the curriculum mean to students or if they have a sense of awareness that would lead them to attend to those questions at all. It would be naïve not to take note of the passiveness and apathy that invades school communities in varying degrees. When the bell that regulates the daily routine sounds to mark the lunch hour and students flock to the doors, stampeding together in a mass exodus, I cannot help but wonder in what way is the physical fleeing symbolic of the mental?

In my conversations with my three student research participants, we had carefully considered many elements of Social Studies as a subject area but school, in a more holistic sense, had remained uncharted territory. And so, one afternoon sitting in our usual spot in the library, I finally found the courage to ask Jordan, "What is the purpose of school?" What followed was a longer silence than usual and I allowed my mind to fill these slow moments with worry that she might confirm my fears. Jordan combed her fingers through her hair, pulling her long bangs to one side in the way that she does when she is thinking or considering how to respond, thoughtfully choosing her words. Her tone was confident, but faintly suspicious, when she replied, "That's a hard question. I've never actually been asked that before" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Together we established that the fact she had never been asked, or never really took it upon herself to consider it, was weird. After all, she had already invested years of her life in schooling and for what purpose? I cannot say I was surprised in any way by Jordan's answer. She is an exceptionally bright young woman who is confident and competent in all aspects of her academics. Her abilities are paired with a steady and conscientious effort; a combination that yields scholastic success. Because schools do not commonly foster such critical thinking, and as a student who experiences success with the system, Jordan had never felt

inclined to ask, "Where am I in this?" To answer my question about the purpose of school Jordan furthered her initial response with, "The higher education you get, the higher job you can get, and if you get a higher education, you can have more options. The point of school is just to give people the chance to go out there and pursue what they want" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Jordan's understanding of the purpose of schooling was attached to a notion that school gives one the ability to attain employment or pursue a certain career.

My conversations with Myles and Elizabeth followed a similar pattern. To my query Myles responded rapidly, and rather bluntly, with "to learn so I can get a job" (Recorded conversation, October 26, 2012). Always honest and forthright in our conversations, Myles never attempted to tell me what he thought I might like to hear and, as a result, I had braced myself for this response. He did not require time to contemplate it in the way Jordan did; it was evident that Myles had already formulated this belief and was holding strong to it before I had asked him.

Elizabeth and I explored the notion of schooling together as well. Of the purpose she said, "It's to get an education so you can be successful in life" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Elizabeth furthered her explanation by offering these thoughts: "There are different types of successful because there are kinds for every person." While initially encouraged by these ideas, as our conversation progressed I began to notice contradictions in the thoughts Elizabeth was expressing and I wondered if they were reflective of an inner struggle to make sense of schooling and success. She told me, "Get a job, don't pick one that you're going to hate and be stuck with for the rest of your life. Just pick one that you feel you're going to enjoy the most and get the most out of, like the most money and stuff" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). At this point in our conversation, the bridge from school to success had become equated

with monetary gain. Students are not immune to the mantras that are relentlessly preached about the necessity of staying in school to get a job. This mantra seems to be shaping their understanding of the purpose of school and it seems to be based primarily on economics.

Taken together, these conversations served to further confirm my sense that students are there because they perceive schooling to be a requirement to move forward in life; more of a hoop than a well-placed foundational block. From my perspective, and after conversing openly with students, it seems that in their minds schooling is not a want but a need, occupational aspirations trump matters of personal development. While attaining gainful employment is necessary to the well-being of a person, what more might be important in matters of self-understanding, self-worth and identity? As Noddings (2009) reminds us, "There is more to individual life and the life of a nation than economic superiority" (p. 431).The students' responses added to my questions about their overall perceptions of the relevancy of school. As I think back to the conversations shared with Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan and our in-depth explorations about the content and topics addressed in Social Studies, I admit I was struck by their lack of personal connection to the subject matter, but it seems that is only one piece of a larger puzzle. Encouraged by the words of Wheatley and Frieze (2011) as they reassure that "behind these questions – perhaps the reason we're brave enough to ask them – is a deep intuition that things could be better" (pp. 13-14), I reached out to Sarah to help me make sense of my perceptions. Being on the cusp of entering the teaching profession, frequently shifting roles between classroom teacher and university student, she was awake to this tension as well, juggling sentiments about preparation for the future and a desire for genuine education. "I hope that students recognize that the purpose of school and the reason they are in our classes is not to just learn the information laid out in the curriculum, but rather we are there to facilitate a

discussion on why that information is important to our world" (Personal communication, March 10, 2012). Sarah's words invite further exploration into another ongoing and emergent theme born of this research and that is a distinction that can be made between schooling and education. Perhaps this is also a conversation to have explicitly with students because, as Noddings (2006) noted, "Surely high school students should be involved in the study of what it means to be educated" (p. 15).

Exploring the Difference Between Schooling and Education

There are some associations that just seem natural: peanut butter and jam, bees and honey, school and education? Often we synonymously interchange the terms 'school' and 'education' without delving into the deeper historical, social, and political constructs that, taken together, place these two terms at opposite ends of the learning spectrum. All three of the student research participants seem to have an internalized sense of this difference if we consider the ways in which they reflected upon their learning in the Roots project and lay that alongside how they articulated the purpose of school. Although they did not express an awareness that such a distinction exists when they were asked to consider the purpose of school, they seem to understand that schooling is just one element of a holistic education comprised of social, emotional, mental and physical facets.

Curriculum theorist John Dewey (1938) wrote, "The traditional scheme is, in essence, one of imposition from above and outside" (p. 18) and this is often what we witness in schools. He extends this interpretation by explaining

> Learning here means acquisition of what already is incorporated in books and in the heads of elders. Moreover, that which is taught is thought of as essentially static. It is

taught as a finished product, with little regard either to the ways in which it was originally built up or to changes that will surely occur in the future. (p. 19)

There is no room for consultation or inclusion of alternative perspectives or understandings. Furthermore, “it is all made ‘for listening’ – because simply studying lessons out of a book is only another kind of listening; it marks the dependency of one mind upon another” (Dewey, 2001, p. 22). Although Dewey philosophized in a different social, political and economic climate, largely influenced by Industrialization, his foundational theories remain relevant in the present day context. His ideas can be used to support Goodlad’s (2004) notion of universality in that while “*schools* differ; *schooling* is everywhere very much the same” (p. 264) and Noddings (2009) criticism that “we do not even ask whether that education [may be] appropriate for anyone, much less everyone” (p. 429). These interpretations by Dewey, Goodlad and Noddings conjure up sentiments of formal, institutionalized styles of learning that typically include purposefully sharpened pencils, straight rows of desks, and rote memorization. Doll (1993) identified that schools continue to be characterized by “the linear, sequential, easily quantifiable ordering system … – one focusing on clear beginnings and definite endings” (p. 3). It is not surprising that these structures define schooling; Wheatley’s (2009) observation of societal organization in general alludes to the pervasiveness of systemic divisions and compartmentalization. “It’s a world of separations and clear boundaries: jobs in boxes, lines delineating relationships, roles and policies describing what each individual does and who we expect them to be” (p. 100). Unfortunately, I believe the atmosphere created by the paradigmatic structures of schooling serve to form the hoop that Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan are poised to jump through; just as many before them have done.

How Schooling is Impacted by Colonial Effects

It is impossible to separate the physical construct of school, and the accompanying theoretical foundational principles of schooling, from the deeply entrenched colonial views that continue to shape present day perspectives. The consequences of our global colonial history are far reaching, varied, and complex. Doll (2002) states, "The ghost in the curriculum has been control" (p. 28) and I would elaborate upon the element of control to say it is born of colonial practice. Pushor (2012) uses Memmi's understanding of "protectorate" to make sense of how these historical ramifications play out in our schools. She describes the "concept of a protectorate as a colonist structure in which those with strength (the colonizers) take charge to protect those they believe have little or no strength (the colonized)" (p. 466). To extend the ideas of Dewey, Goodlad and Noddings, and re-examine them within the colonial context, we can look to Memmi's (1991) teachings as a means of drawing parallels. He writes, "Far from wanting to understand him [the student] as he really is, the colonizer [the school] is preoccupied with making him undergo this urgent change" (p. 83). As a consequence of this prevailing ideology, Western schooling breeds feelings of inferiority among those who do not experience success, cannot relate their own individual experiences, and thus believe that, because they think differently or do not achieve at a certain level, they are a failure (Schooling the World, 2010). With these feelings of inferiority comes the rejection of personal knowledge that is not validated by formalized systems (Schooling the World, 2010) because "the colonized is never characterized in an individual manner; he is entitled only to drown in an anonymous collectivity" (Memmi, 1991, p. 85) Such rejection creates concern for individuals and communities who have lost or are poised to lose localized ways of knowing because "as the children became daily witness to this school curriculum making, the diversity among, and complexities within, their

lives … slowly become silent" (Huber, Murphy & Clandinin, 2011, p. 105). When we problematize and challenge these historical constructs of schooling and create space in our classrooms and curriculums for the stories and perspectives of individuals like Elizabeth and her Great Grandma, the culture and nature of the learning can be changed, moving toward a more authentic and open education.

In contrast to schooling, education, then, "can be regarded as a process concerned with expanding and deepening the kinds of meaning people can have in their lives" (Eisner, 1998, p. 7). Dewey (1938) equates education with experience in the broadest sense. Whether educative or not, "the environment, the world of experience, constantly grows larger and, so to speak, thicker" (p. 74). Greene's (1995) hope for students is that they "grasp the *shapes* of our geography, the *story* of our democracy" (p.188), At times schooling may serve as a detriment to education, inhibiting the development of authentic thoughts and understandings formulated by students. Furthermore, the institutional nature of schooling can prevent the aims and goals of education from being realized.

> There is little in the data to suggest that the high school curriculum contributed to job competence or satisfaction, later participation in civic and political activities, or life enjoyment. What young adults remembered about schools were the learnings that creative teachers had managed to link up with their lives at the time they were adolescents. (Goodlad, 2004, p. 15)

The teachers that Goodlad describes were able to envision an alternative approach and, in doing so, foster a spirit of education in spite of the often limiting confines of school and narrow curricular approaches.

Reconceptualising the purpose of school.

Doll (2002) advocates for

> a reconceptualization of the very nature of curriculum. This reconceptualization has its roots entwined in the history of Western education and intellectual thought: located in the separation between *curriculum* (a noun) and *currere* (a verb) … between training and enlightening, between knowledge transmitted/received and knowledge emergent/created. (p. 23)

Schwartz, Lindgren and Lewis (2009) ask, "What experiences prepare students to construct knowledge in the future and in the wild? This question is important because learning should not end once students leave the classroom and lose a teacher's direct guidance" (p. 35). If the goal of Social Studies teachers is to inspire active and engaged citizens, as the outcomes state, this query of what is important in the wild becomes particularly poignant because the majority of the time that students spend filling duties of citizenship is in the absence of a teacher; as they join a community group, strike up a conversation with someone in line at the grocery store, or arrive at a polling station. When I asked Jordan whether or not the Roots assignment was an important project for us to be tackling together as class she responded, "I think so. I think it's important that we know who we are and who our family is and if we know who our family is then we can get a better grasp on who we are and have more respect for other people's families and situations" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). In her project she penned, "Not having you [family outside of her Mom] in my life has made me realize that it's okay to not have the stereotypical Mom, Dad, brother and sister and white picket fence family" (written assignment for Roots project). To me, this statement signifies profound learning, the kind of learning that cannot be encapsulated in a curriculum document or universally taught with one strategy. These moments

of transformational learning are born of genuine interest to make sense of her own situation and a commitment by student, family, and teacher to work together to begin to foster an understanding of the complex and complicated matters that impact all of us. Jordan's acceptance and acknowledgement of family diversity will cause her to be a more empathetic citizen. Through more deliberate and purposeful approaches to information, in combination with attending to and working with students in richer ways, as a teacher I was able to facilitate meaningful applications and connections to student learning. As we worked to re-conceptualize the meaning of education, connecting schooling with the daily lived experiences of students and working to make sense of those experiences together, through this assignment teachers and students alike began to see a different way of being, understanding and learning.

Learning through Narrative and Story

It is not uncommon for elementary teachers to feature a rotating "special student" or incorporate "show and tell" into their weekly or monthly routine. Excited youngsters choose an artifact or event with significant meaning and animatedly tell their classmates and teachers all about it. I can recall taking my pin collection on one such occasion. As a family we spent many summers and weekends on the road with our beloved tent trailer. Stopping to investigate all the towns we came across and always buying a small lapel pin to commemorate our visit, I had compiled quite the collection. I organized my collection geographically and stuck it into a piece of cork board with the help of my mom. On this particular occasion I was asked to present by my teacher taking my turn in the cue of special students. Oblivious to the learning outcomes and rotation cycle determined by the teacher, I was happy to sit on the stool at the front of the classroom and point out La Ronge, SK as my favorite pin because it was made from a moose antler. For those who have the privilege of working with young children, they know that

children never require a formal invitation to share their stories; all that is required is an ear or two in close enough proximity. Telling stories, true or imagined, is a primary mode of communication for children. Yet at some point we begin to value these stories less; they aren't as cute or as funny and so we learn as we grow older to tuck them away and keep them to ourselves. As Norma Cameron described, we "mistakenly [believe] that stories [are] just the stuff of childhood and better left behind" (TED Cultivating Narrative Intelligence). She argues that:

> As we evolve into a global community, the skill of a storyteller – cultivating imagination, embracing listening and exercising perceptual agility – are needed more than ever before. Why? Through listening, gathering, and telling stories we can develop sympathy and empathy for others and tap into an incredible source of 'local' wisdom, essential ingredients for any civil society (normacameron.wordpress.com)

The very nature of storytelling, and learning narratively, requires us to devote concentrated energy to those in our company. "It's the difference between being on autopilot and tuning in … We're so accustomed to *checking out* and remaining in a perpetual state of disconnect" (Quesada, 2011, p. 37). When we resist the urge to check out we are able to reap the civic rewards that Cameron outlines while affirming that stories retain value outside of childhood. Narrative thought "places its emphasis on sense; how a situation, person, or object 'feels'…[it] prizes the metaphorical, emphasizes connotation, exploits ambiguity to convey meanings that are suggested by it, and speaks of intention or purpose or agency rather than cause" (Bruner in Eisner, 1998, p. 11). This method of understanding stands as a potential solution to the disconnect felt by Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan concerning the topics and subject matter covered in class. People of all ages have an inclination to narrative ways of knowing and learning that we come by naturally.

"Human beings are storytellers by nature. In many guises, as folktale, legend, myth, epic, history, motion picture and television program, the story appears in every known human culture" (McAdams, 1993, p.27). I am grateful to have had the opportunity to observe how the students responded to the application of this style of learning in the classroom as my research unfolded.

Curiosity and the Power of Story.

Sarah and I compiled a selection of objects, some of which had distinct meaning from our own personal contexts while others were selected at random to include the following: one knitted mitten, a black and white photo of a girl and her pony, a baseball, a bell, a red plastic toy shovel, an antique brooch, a blank compact disk, half of a ticket stub, a trophy, and an old tea cup with matching saucer. In small groups, we invited the students to select an object and imagine a story about the piece they selected, building on Helen's encouragement to "take a nugget and build a story" (field note, October 15, 2012). The classroom erupted into excited chatter as groups clustered in the corners of the classroom and spilled out into the hallway. The rising noise levels and animated expressions of the students seemed to be in direct correlation with the excitement shared by Sarah and me, exchanging eager glances across the classroom.

We regrouped as a class providing students the opportunity to share the stories they had generated about their chosen object. Neither Sarah nor I were prepared for what followed. The mitten had inspired a tale of a young girl asking her Grandmother to tell her a story. The Grandmother described how as a young woman she had lost one of her mittens on a snowy day. A young man found the mitten and followed her tracks so that he could return it. Upon catching up with her the man questioned, "Excuse me. Is this yours?" The young girl wanted to know what happened next. "Well, that young man is your Grandfather," smiled the Grandmother. The students who selected the ticket stub spun an emotive web about a son's efforts to be next to his

father in his dying moments; half of the train ticket was buried with the father and the other half carried by the son to both remember and connect. In the eyes of the students, the blank compact disk contained family photos that were left at home while a son ventured overseas to serve his country not knowing if he would ever return. With each story shared we were transported to another time and place, silently imagining the reality created by the students' words. Sarah confided that the brooch had belonged to her Great Grandmother and, similar to the students' imagined interpretation, it had been passed down through generations. I revealed that the black and white photo was of my own Grandmother riding her childhood pony, Jet.

Through this task the students demonstrated that "different peoples see the world differently – see past and future, themselves and others differently. Curiosity and respect make it possible to enter into those alternative visions" (Bateson, 2000, p. 171). The students were lost in the worlds they had created alongside their peers, swept away in a rush of empathetic thought as they were imaging together. When Myles and I reflected on this lesson together he told me, "The story about the ticket changed my perspective because it could have actually been used for something like that" (Recorded conversation, October 19, 2012). The meaning of the object was enhanced through the narrative shared by his peers, forging a lasting connection.

Recall Goodlad's (2004) exploration of the challenge faced by teachers and students of social sciences, quoted in chapter two:

> The topics commonly included in the social sciences appear as though they would be of great human interest. But something strange seems to have happened to them on the way

> to the classroom. The topics of study become removed from their intrinsically human character, reduced to the dates and places readers will recall memorizing for tests. (p. 212)

During this exercise students were engaged in historical thought as many chose to set their stories in another era. The stories also contained relationships, emotions, and consequences. Students were able to connect with and explore humanistic components of the tales they created because "stories are less about facts and more about meanings" (McAdams, 1993, p.28); meanings missing from the standard textbooks used to teach Social Studies. And although these stories were fictitious, nothing more than constructs of teenage imagination, they represent so much more. I am reminded of Elizabeth's love of people, Jordan's desire to get to know Columbus the man and not simply the fact, and Myles' search for a funny little tidbit embedded in the immigration story of his family; small but significant details that emerge when we slow down and look to the people themselves who created the history. I am encouraged by the unfolding of this lesson and am inspired to continue to explore ways to reconnect with the lost humanistic element of teaching, learning, and classroom life. When I inquired, "Did you enjoy this activity?" a unanimous chorus of voices exclaimed, "Yes!" (Field note, October 18, 2012). Noddings (2006) prompts, "We must ask what content is most likely to produce the understandings we seek, and we should also ask what content is crucial in its own right" (p. 286). There is value in learning narratively and nurturing habits of empathy, imagination, and curiosity.

Story in the Projects

From the beginning of the Roots project, and this research, the teaching team had hoped that we could introduce the students to the belief that "everyone here has something to teach me" (Wheatley, 2009, p. 34). Jeffrey emphasized the desire for students to "connect that even people

who weren't written about in history books still have meaningful history" (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012) and, in many ways, we observed this in our students as they retold conversations shared with family and friends.

Elizabeth was very curious about the societal context that shaped the life of her Great-Grandma and other family members. She told me, "I like to just relate to nowadays from back then and see the difference and how it can relate to me" (Recorded conversation, October 18, 2012). Elizabeth's comment reminds me of Bateson's (2000) insight that "every newborn is also an immigrant, and our era is unique in that each new generation is born into a changing country" (p. 99). In this case, students benefit from asking questions to satisfy their queries and also to prompt more questions "because questions are one of the key ways generations can connect" (Bateson, 2000, p. 76) and help students make sense of the past and in turn their own present. Elizabeth also told me, "I definitely like learning about the past. I find I can picture my family doing all this stuff and I'm like whoa that's interesting because I can picture it" (Recorded conversation, October 10, 2012). Elizabeth's experience satisfies Jeffrey's goal for the Roots project:

> I hope that they learned about the way stories shape us because some of them have artifacts in their home that have a story and so obviously the fact that this artifact is displayed in their home and it's telling a story that has been passed down that they learn a sense of the power of story and how they shape us and who we are and our identity. (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012)

Yet there are still challenges as we encourage students to be awake to intergenerational learning and the power of story. Jeffrey, Sarah, and I collapsed our exhausted selves down on to the couches in the classroom one afternoon, the last of the students having finally trickled out.

We debriefed our individual experiences and the collective experiences of the group. Jeffrey said, as I noted in Chapter 3, "I think bottom line we just wish that some of the them would have connected their history a little bit more with their own comments and insights with how their lives are affected and what the story means to them" (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012). We are making progress but there is still work to be done to make this a valued style of learning.

Cultivating Relationships

It is my belief that everything I do as a teacher is directly influenced by relationships. The relational nature of the teaching profession is undeniable; days are filled with hundreds of individual and group interactions whether they are rewarding, frustrating, or a plethora of other emotions. Healthy student relationships with self, teacher, and community all serve to enhance and enrich the learning experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. I was pleased to witness the strengthening of these relationships throughout the research process.

Relationship with Self

Noddings (2006) wrote, "Possibly no goal of education is more important – or more neglected – than self-understanding" (p. 10). This statement is complimented by the notion that "the aim of a genuine education is to draw out our full humanity, helping us to create ever-more authentic and caring relationships with ourselves, each other and the entirety of creation" (Uhl & Stuchul, 2011, p.75). Yet, as I sat in consultation with the students and listened attentively as they articulated their understandings of school, these themes were all but absent from the dialogue. My personal experiences in the field of education tell me that the above sentiments would be met with varying degrees of resistance by some colleagues and stakeholders too; most likely those same voices that echo in the minds of the students telling them economics is the

primary function of school. It is all too easy to adopt this belief given “the only justification for much of what is taught in secondary school is that it is needed or required at the next level of schooling” (Noddings, 2006, p. 285). Nurturing self-understanding requires both teachers and students to look beyond the formalities of testing and achievement that can become at times all-consuming. Perhaps through a slowing of pace, the promotion of a more open environment, and taking the initiative to connect and foster genuine relationships, this complex task of education for self-realization can be actualized.

When I think of Jordan I cannot help but smile as I reflect on just how far we journeyed together from our first conversation. Initially I had been tentative. She seemed to sense this, and, in return, mirror my emotions. I wondered if perhaps this project, paired with her role as a student research participant, would create unnecessary anxiety. All of my trepidation was unfounded; despite our cautious first steps I was so grateful to witness Jordan’s process. At the same time I cannot shake the guilt and shame that comes from assuming that she would be perhaps too fragile, or unable to maturely articulate her experiences as a student and a daughter. With each passing conversation, and as Jordan worked to make sense of her own thoughts and feelings, a new aura of confidence began to envelop her when we spoke of her project. She told me that “the thought process to write that letter. What I had to go through… Learning about myself; that’s what I liked most about it” (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). Bateson (2000) wrote, “In learning, one is changed, becoming someone slightly – or sometimes profoundly – different” (p. 171). The depth and truth of this quote is reflected in Jordan’s writing, “So, I guess I’d like to say thank you for helping me to be the person I am today” (Written assignment for Roots project). This written acknowledgment speaks to the personal growth and connections that Jordan made, even if she could not find the words to tell me.

When we engage in these explorations that bring the experiences of the students to the forefront of our learning, “students [are invited to] bring their increased maturity, creativity, and skill to bear on the study of issues that are of importance to their own families and neighbors” (Smith & Sobel, 2010, p. 24). For Jordan this meant tackling hegemonic notions of family and advocating for more inclusive representations and understandings of family. Because of the personal nature of the Roots project, each student was charting a unique path, learning more and more about themselves, their relations, and their understanding of the complex interplay between societal structures as they went.

Elizabeth also alluded to changes and more thorough understandings within herself as a result of the project. She expressed a deeper respect for her Great Grandma and optimistically looked forward to her future, and the future of her relations, knowing that she too could make changes for the better as was discussed in Chapter Three. Taken together, Jordan and Elizabeth exemplify that “when students embrace rather than ignore or deride their own ancestry and traditions, they will be more likely to commit themselves to the difficult but rewarding work of making their communities good place to live” (Smith & Sobel, 2010, p. 47). They are able to do so because of the confidence and awareness that arises from knowing who they are.

A Shared Experience: Enhancing the Student Teacher Relationship

Mr. Hollings and I gradually moved from high school teacher and student, to mentor and mentee, and eventually colleagues as he loved to call us. Although our relationship changed and adapted in accordance with each new role we assumed, it never weakened. Each of these stages came with new crises that needed fixing, new lessons that needed learning, and new topics of conversation, yet, no matter the context, he was genuine, he was real, and his support was unwavering. From the very first time I stepped into his classroom, I could sense that he cared; to

him we were more than students – we were young adults with thoughts and opinions of our own, with emotions that could pass through four seasons during a block, and we had lives outside of the classroom that he not only acknowledged but sincerely wanted to know about. As students, as teenagers, and as individuals, we mattered to him.

As much as I enjoyed every minute with my student research participants, I couldn't help but feel a twinge of guilt. As a teacher in the classroom I had always prided myself on greeting my students at the door, chatting at school festivities and sporting events, and making the effort to get to know them as individuals. Those little moments, while valuable, paled in comparison to the dedicated one on one time I shared with Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan. I found myself relaying pieces of information to Jeffrey and Sarah about learning styles, preferences, and seemingly small yet significant details that I was learning about the students that, taken together, created a more coherent and complete learner profile. Our conversations were also always very rich because we were speaking about topics that mattered to the students. Wheatley (2009) writes that "real change begins with the simple act of people talking about what they care about" (p. 26) and while her words are intended to speak to social change, they are exceptionally relevant for our research context as well. The students were synthesizing their experiences in a way that they hoped might provide insight that could potentially breed change for future Social Studies teachers and students. At the same time, through their words, they welcomed me into their homes, to the conversations shared around the kitchen table, and stories passed down like precious heirlooms. We were truly learning about one another.

The student teacher relationship plays a significant role in the Roots assignment and also stands to be strengthened by it. Students must have developed a trust with their teacher in order to feel safe and comfortable sharing work of this personal nature. Students are able to identify a

caring teacher because “they’ll show it: how they teach, how they act, when they talk to you” (Myles, Recorded conversation, November 2, 2012). Feeling vulnerable in the absence of relationship, students may not disclose the true findings and realizations that came from their work in an authentic way. As Jeffrey explained,

> [The Roots project] requires that there is a strong respect and trust there to begin with because we are asking them to write about personal things and if they didn’t think of us as real people who would be touched by the things that they write, if we were just coldly looking for mechanical errors, as far as relationships goes for this assignment it’s really important to have a strong pre-existing relationship as a prerequisite for their work to be meaningful. (Recorded conversation, November 9, 2012)

While this relationship must be pre-existing, it also serves to be strengthened as teachers begin to see their students in different contexts and glimpse into their realities outside of school.

One afternoon Elizabeth and I were attempting to determine criteria for what strong teacher student relationships look like and she declared that teachers should “get to know [their] students. Talk to them about stuff not just about the topic. Just stop and ask them a question about their life” (Recorded conversation, October 29, 2012). With the Roots project, students were provided a platform to share, to whatever degree they were comfortable, about their lives. Teachers were provided a multiplicity of talking points to engage with the students not in just small talk but in a dialogue about who they are and what is important to them. When we know our students, and I mean the knowing that is a multi-faceted construction built by taking genuine interest and noticing details in both conversation and behavior, we are better able to engage them. “Authorizing student perspectives can directly improve educational practice because when teachers listen to and learn from students they can begin to see the world from those student

perspectives" (Cook-Sather, 2002, p. 3). The Community Education cohort was invited to attend the Social Justice and Anti-racist, Anti-oppressive Forum on Education (SAFE) Conference hosted annually at the University of Saskatchewan. When Jeffrey was asking which students would like to attend the various sessions, I was able to advocate for Elizabeth to attend one in particular, knowing her personal interests and experiences. By virtue of knowing our students we are able to facilitate those connections and extend their learning in meaningful ways.

To achieve the crucial rationale of Social Studies, to engage students as citizens, it is critical that they are invited "to tell their stories, to pose their own questions, to be present – from their own perspective – to the common world" (Greene, 1992, p. 34). In doing so they will have the opportunity to foster meaningful relationships with and between their peers and their teachers that will enable them to develop the connections and seek the relevance they are seeking. The development of relationships is not limited to the classroom, especially as we integrate narrative and intergenerational methods of learning.

Community building

As students became more aware of how they are situated in their own personal histories they also became more sensitive to the positions of those around them. Deci (1995) wrote, "As people become more authentic … they also become capable of a deeper relatedness to others" (p. 6). Through this self-awareness and consciousness of others there is great potential to build caring and inclusive communities in the classroom, school, and beyond. "When you let your lives touch and make the effort of asking questions and listening to the stories they tell, you discover the intricate patterns of their differences and, at the same time, the underlying themes that all members of our species have in common" (Bateson, 2000, p. 5). During the course of our Roots projects, teachers and students had successfully made people the most important

element of our study and the reverberations from this were felt in a plethora of small but tangible ways.

One afternoon Elizabeth and I were walking back to the classroom after a recorded conversation in the library, chatting and catching up on the latest happenings in the class. Elizabeth paused at the bottom of the stairs that would lead us back up to the classroom. She looked at me, with a sincere look on her face, and asked, “Can I tell you a story about my Dad and Uncle?” (Field note, October 25th, 2012). These connections, although sometimes removed from the formal curriculum, assist teachers in the delivery of the curriculum and enable them to approach topics in a way that link them to students’ lives and communities. Elizabeth knew that I would be happy to hear her stories because “[i]t’s easier for us to tell our story, to share our dreams and fears, when we feel others are genuinely curious about us” (Wheatley, 2009, p. 34).

In another instance Jeffrey was explaining to students about the potential for the class to attend a conference at the University. Myles, knowing that I was involved with a conference around that time, turned to me and whispered, “Is that your conference?” That little moment, shared privately between him and me, strengthened our connection in ways I cannot describe. Speaking and listening – connecting in the classroom and outside of the classroom – aware of what is happening in the lives of others…After all, “above all, we need to understand how we can learn from one another (Bateson, 2000, p.18)

The Students Share Their Learning with Pre-Service Teachers

One afternoon I invited four students from the Community Education cohort to join me at the University to speak to a literacy class I was teaching in the College of Education. Sarah attended as well to support the students as we believed that having two teachers in the room with whom the students were comfortable might afford a greater sense of security and result in a freer

sharing of experiences. We planned for a very informal presentation; each student would speak about a different assignment they had done in class and then the undergraduate students would have the opportunity to ask questions to the panel of students. The undergraduate students were keen to hear from the Grade 9 students, curious about their opinions and classroom experiences. The physical layout of the classroom added to the relaxed approach to the talk as the four students sat on tables at the front of the classroom, swinging their legs, allowing them to see and be seen by their audience. Sarah and I sat off to the side in a way that permitted us to maintain eye contact with all four students and to offer encouragement and prompt them to extend their responses when needed.

One of the students spoke of the Roots project and outlined the approach the class took in conducting their research, highlighting the importance of personal communication. The students noted that every project in the class was unique and then exemplified this by each sharing what they considered to be their own most valuable lesson. Myles looked over at me and smiled. He then turned to the class and said, "Lindsey already knows this, but my parents got married in Chicago" (Field note, March 4, 2013). Having never left Canada himself, Myles would often bring this up in our one on one conversations, a little nugget he was so pleased to have uncovered. Another student began explaining her process, how she determined what to investigate, and what she discovered. She became so caught up in the moment she animatedly expressed, "And I was learning all this stuff and it was so cool and I was like 'Whoa! I never knew that before!'" (Field note, March 4, 2013). The undergraduate students could not help but chuckle at her enthusiasm. Slimbach (2010) writes, "It seems to take up-close and personal encounters with those of other social worlds to instruct us about our common humanity and our deepest differences, all the while inducing us to live beyond narrow identities and allegiances" (p.

6). In this process of talking about their experiences with undergraduate students, the students demonstrated how their identities had expanded and how they saw past some of their taken for granted generalizations and exchanged those for new avenues of exploration and understanding. It was amazing to witness how confident all four students were in the way they articulated their findings and how willing they were to share the pieces of their projects, and life stories, with the class. As I sat watching this all unfold in front of me in the classroom I reflected on something Helen had told me over coffee months earlier – about what happens when you center the learning around the developmental needs and interests of individual students. She had foreshadowed this experience by telling me "what you see is a more confident, happy student" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Even an undergraduate student commented that it was hard to believe they were Grade 9 students; the manner in which they spoke and conducted themselves conveyed levels of maturity that would lead one to believe they were older (Field note, March 6, 2013). Perhaps, as Elizabeth described, the students were well on their way to becoming rooted.

Chapter Five: Reflections

There are some stories that are never told but instead are dutifully preserved behind carefully constructed façades. While perhaps on occasion our intuition may hint that there is more than what meets the eye, we often accept the partial and subjective truths of others. And then there are stories that are told time and time again; favorites that have been shared more times than we can remember, but, nonetheless we are always happy to hear them one more time. Yet "when you are in the middle of a story it isn't a story at all … it's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all. When you're telling it, to yourself or to someone else" (Atwood, 1996, p. 298). We are simply living out a series of moments strung together like beads on a string that together make up our lives. Rarely do we take the time, in the moment, to craft how it might be relayed later because the retelling hinges on so many incidentals: the audience, the mood, the setting, and when an opportunity might arise, if it does at all. We tailor the retelling and reliving (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in a way that invites the others present to journey back to those moments with us – to connect and become part of our story.

I smile to think of all the stories that were told to the students during this research process and the subsequent retelling that occurred among family, peers, and teachers. I wonder which stories will stay with the students, knowing that "the stories we hear and the stories we tell shape the meaning and texture of our lives at every stage and juncture" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 1). Which stories will they continue to retell and perhaps, over time, find themselves filling in a forgotten detail or two with their own interpretations and imaginations? Will the significance of these stories change as the students' place within their schools, families, and society continues to shift at the mercy of the inevitable ebb and flow of life? When I think back to my initial research puzzle, wondering how to help students establish a sense of self through welcoming family

stories into the classroom, I had hoped to personalize the curriculum and make it relevant in the context of students' individual lives. Now looking back I was unaware of the depth and impact that this research would have on my personal and professional understandings of teaching and learning. As I move forward from here, these experiences will too become stories that I carry and share as they continue to shape my understandings. The wisdom of Thomas King (2003) resonates with me as I reflect on this journey, "The truth about stories is that's all we are" (p. 2).

There is a story that is repeatedly told in my family. As a child I reveled in the humor of this particular tale, picturing my Grandpa and his feisty sister as young children engaging in fun and mischief. I asked for the story to be told again and again, never growing tired of it. As I grew older, I began to understand the anecdote as something more than just a funny story. It became a depiction of a reality different from my own; the encapsulation of an era I will never have the opportunity to explore. Now as I reflect on the same story again today I comprehend it in yet another new way, drawing metaphorical parallels to the research I have just completed and the resulting lingering questions that remain unanswered.

My Grandpa grew up in the community of Bridgeland on the side of a very large and steep hill in Calgary, Alberta. The youngest of seven children, he was especially close to his sister, Marjorie, who is his elder by a little more than a year. From their own personal narratives, as well as the recollections and pictures painted by the tales of their siblings, the "spoiled" pair ran amuck and never ventured far from trouble. One day, while my Grandpa was seated in the family's old wicker bassinet, my Great Auntie Marj sent it flying down Bridgeland hill. There are conflicting accounts as to whether this was purposeful or accidental; perhaps it may have been a combination of the two. Regardless, Grandpa travelled at top speeds down the hill in the bassinet through an assortment of neighbours' gardens en route.

When I think of my conversations with Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan and the perspectives they revealed to me about Social Studies and school in general, I think how I, as a teacher, have acted as Auntie Marj while gripping the handle of the bassinet or, more specifically, organizing and facilitating various programs of study in the classroom. I know I am guilty of having sent students blindly hurtling down a steep hill without taking time to slow down, contextualize, and derive personal and lasting connections from the gardens, or curriculum, they encounter along the way. Just as Grandpa and Aunti Marj changed their approach to the hill with the changing of the seasons, trading the bassinet for a toboggan when the snow blanketed the gardens on the hillside, I feel I too have experienced a change of season in the way I approach learning through narrative, the incorporation of family stories, and my approach to Social Studies.

No Two Are Alike: Personal Learning

As time passed during my research and my presence in the classroom became more established and comfortable, my conversations with students and teachers grew richer. I valued the opportunity to join in the classroom community and share in both the struggles and celebrations of members. Being invited into the vulnerability of the students' lives and being trusted with personal details about their understandings and experiences with family, alongside schooling and education, was cause for the development of very meaningful relationships between us. I was surprised by how quickly I bonded with each of the three student research participants and how open and honest they were willing to be about both their school and family lives. There is a piece of me that wonders if perhaps these relationships were expedited in part

due to a predetermined ethic of care; as a researcher I was genuinely interested in Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan's personalized accounts and was conducting the research in an attempt to enhance student experiences with Social Studies. There was a strong element of reciprocity in each relationship formed during this research process. I felt encouraged when Elizabeth would skip "hello" and instead go straight to "Can we talk today?" Without these relationships that are built on trust and honesty, this type of work could not be done. I am thankful for the experience of working with these young people in such a direct way and for the opportunity to build relationships while learning and growing together.

When we attempt to come to an understanding of the lived experiences of others and how that situates them within society at local and global levels there is always an opportunity for personal development.

> To attend means to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience. It means to take care of. … I believe that if we can learn a deeper noticing of the world around us, this will be the basis of effective concern. (Bateson, 1994, p. 109)

It was an interesting experience to be part of the daily lived experiences in the classroom without assuming the responsibility of lead teacher. Without shouldering the primary responsibility for planning, organization, curricular connections, classroom management and other elements on the never ending list of aspects that require teacher attention, I was able to take time to observe classroom dynamics in a new way. As I consciously shifted between teacher and researcher and learner, I found myself becoming awake to the distinct roles and responsibilities that characterize each of the noted positions.

Bassinets and Toboggans: My Evolving Teaching Philosophy

As I take time to re-examine my teaching philosophy at the conclusion of my study, I am able to identify the beginnings of a meaningful evolution of thought and also perhaps hints of naivety that were present in my earlier practice. Student relationships and the acknowledgement that every student is an individual have always been a foundational belief of mine and have subsequently shaped my approach to teaching and education. I had thought that the support and affirmation of students in regard to their unique capacities was something I had done well until I had the opportunity to spend one on one time with Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan. Having open and direct conversations about students' experiences with school and gaining insight into the perspectives they exposed, in the concrete manner in which they were communicated, was transformational for my understandings as a teacher. I discovered there is a very real difference between thinking you know where your students are at and hearing from them how they are truly feeling. In the case of all three student research participants, they obliged the requests made of Jeffery and Sarah in the classroom and with respect to assignments with no resistance. Their physical way of being in the classroom did little to allude to their social and emotional interpretations of what was happening or their understandings as constructed by previous experiences. I feel I have developed an awareness of student positioning and perception that will serve to counter the taken for granted assumption that just because students are not voicing objection or questioning relevancy they are with you as the teacher.

At the same time, I am awake to the fact that these students only represent three unique perspectives in a class of 30. What are the opinions of Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan's peers? Is there any overlap between their perceptions of school or the aims and goals they hold for their high school education with those of my research participants? Or, as I might suspect, do they

represent a somewhat or an entirely different perspective? As learners, what are the varying degrees to which their needs are being addressed and met? Then, the reality of a high school teacher is to multiply those 30 young people by four or five classes a day. It becomes overwhelming to imagine how to carve time in a day to have the incredibly important conversations with students about what they are learning and how they feel it relates, or does not relate, to their lives. Although daunting, and in some cases perhaps impossible, my conversations with these three inspiring and insightful young students will cause me to further reconsider how I may garner insight from my students about how they are making connections to and finding relevance in social studies curriculum and, despite the challenges, make it a priority in the work I do as a high school teacher. In my previous classroom experience I attempted to connect with students during independent work times yet, because I was never able to remove myself from the role of teacher and was forced to interrupt to attend to various issues, the conversations became disjointed and, as a consequence, lacked authenticity. Perhaps by way of small and thoughtfully created focus groups, I can in the future begin to form connections with students on a more personal level and with more regularity. While there will be logistical puzzles to attend to, I believe it will be well worth the potential gains in the areas of student learning and my teacher practice.

Moving forward in my practice I feel encouraged to make a more concentrated effort to incorporate narrative ways of knowing and understanding in my classroom. Witnessing the enjoyment of the students as they worked to research and formulate connections and understandings narratively was revealing. There was a sense of wholesomeness in the way students described and empathized with one another about the "challenges" they faced when it came to eliciting information, from grandparents in particular. Students spoke with a smile and

even a giggle when the discussed the patience required for lengthy tales that were not guaranteed to reach a conclusion, and the guessing game of matching terms and vocabulary to account for generational differences. A few confessed that they had continued conversations at a later date as a result of the questions that arose from thinking and processing. I believe that the skills and attitudes that compliment this way of learning and being will serve students well as they move through the world. Empathic capabilities, the slowed pace, and a genuine tuning in to the thoughts, opinions and feelings of those that surround them will all serve to help nurture and grow their own ever-developing identities and sense of self. For me this experience manifests itself as a reminder of the need to ensure that humanistic elements of the social sciences are not lost, inviting us to learn from one another and grow together.

"Grandpa, Tell Me That Story Again": Resources & Social Studies Curriculum

I distinctly remember the first day of preliminary planning and student research for the Roots project. Students gravitated towards the computers and began typing in family names, towns and other key associations in Google. I think I knew before they did that they would not experience success with their initial choice of research method but I chose to remain the silent observer, curious about what was unfolding in front of me. Some students slowly navigated to sites like Ancestry.com or other programs that are intended to assist in making genealogical connections. The same frustrations they felt with Google followed them. Persistent, or perhaps too stubborn to explore alternative modes of research, some students continued to search, changing key words and shuffling combinations, alternating between web and photo searches. I believe this serves as a testament to the experiences many students have had in school, reflecting an entrenched belief that "static" (Dewey, p. 19, 1938) information exists and their role as learners is to simply locate and copy, a process void of any critical or creative thinking or active

participation in the construction of knowledge. The Roots project marks a movement away from such a requirement for the organization of collected data into Powerpoints and presentations that Myles recalled doing again and again in his Social Studies classes.

As more students arrived at the realization that the internet would not provide them with the information necessary, they began to talk about what their next move might be. Many students began crafting lists of people with whom they might communicate; taking into account that an aunt or uncle may be emailed while a grandparent might require a scheduled visit or phone call depending on the type of technology that that particular individual uses. I remember Elizabeth telling me that "it's a better learning because it teaches you more than just the information. It teaches you how … to be assertive and go out there and not to just sit and read a book which gives you the information but you get so much more by asking people" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). Included in what Elizabeth refers to as "so much more" is the opportunity to make connections, to listen and dialogue and, in doing so, to engage with one's community and to cultivate social capital.

There is a piece of me that cherishes the fact that my Grandpa's story of his ride in the bassinet down Bridgeland hill will never appear in an internet search; it exists in the hearts and minds of those who have been privileged to hear it in all its various tellings. Through the sharing of these tales family and community bonds are strengthened because, as Norma Cameron explains, when we tell a story those associated with the story stand behind us in spirit, further affirming our connections (Cultivating Narrative Intelligence). At the same time it worries me that these precious anecdotes, of my family and other families, are not preserved in text form. This leads me to question the resources that are being used for instruction in Social Studies classrooms, after watching students endeavor to contextualize and apply the learnings gained

from their Roots project to current social, political and economic understandings. Myles grappled with immigration and how the movement of people has lasting and far reaching impacts. Elizabeth considered the evolution of the city she calls home as she imagined the societal constructs that shaped the lives of her Grandmothers. I am skeptical the students would reach similar levels of engagement through the assigned textbooks. There seems to be an unwritten acknowledgement that one can glean the key concepts from a dense history book through a quick scan of the introduction and summary of any given chapter and not risk missing anything by skipping the pages in between. Perhaps the key concepts, encouraging active and engaged citizens, are not to be found in the pages of a text but in the interactions between people and information. It is in such interactions, where there is reciprocity and exchange, that genuine social capital is developed. I think of Myles and his response to an imagined story shared in class. Having selected the ripped ticket stub from the collection of objects brought to class for an exercise in story and narrative thought, a group of students spun an emotive tale set in the Depression era chronicling a son's journey by train in order to be at his father's side in his final moments. Myles acknowledged that prior to hearing the story he perceived it as it was; a ripped ticket, nothing more, nothing less. However, after having heard the constructed significance, the ticket stub became much more. I wonder if he had seen a photo of the ticket on a textbook page, in the absence of the narrative that surrounded it, if he would have passed right by it.

I wonder how we might make space, in our curricula, in our classrooms, in our textbooks, and in our lives for the personal lived experiences of those who shaped and continue to shape our current worlds. What types of resources lend themselves to the authentic and transformative learning that will assist teachers and students in achieving the goal of encouraging and inviting engaged and active citizens? If the value of narrative is to be realized, how might we better

incorporate the stories of people, places and land into our lessons? One student's project was inspired by a buoy that hangs on the wall in his family home. Curiosity about its significance sparked an investigation that a number of family members were invited to contribute to and learn from. Another student found the courage to question the impact of Residential Schools on her family. Having accessed generalized accounts through textbooks and the media, she embarked on a journey to understand the positioning of her own family through their oral stories and she uncovered findings that countered her original beliefs. The economic and social success experienced by her family contributed to her thinking that there must have been some, at least partially, positive experiences. Through opening up the dialogue, she was able to understand the deep and lasting impacts that continue to influence her family and the relationships within it. Some students accessed photos while others looked to family history books and a few chose to focus their projects on what it means to not know and the consequences of the absence of resources, further questioning why journals and artifacts were not passed on in any meaningful way and acknowledging the inherent value of these pieces.

To extend upon the question of types of resources that may enhance curriculum making in Social Studies, it is important to note that with this may come the potential to build meaningful and authentic bridges that connect the community and the school. In this sense my view of the community does not simply include those who access the school or live within a certain geographical boundary but the seniors, elders, physical structures of the town or city, and landforms. Pursuing opportunities for intergenerational learning may invite students to connect with people and perspectives they may not otherwise encounter. These connections have the potential to validate multiple understandings and ways of knowing and foster a stronger sense of participation and membership within the school community, contributing to the development of

social capital. By approaching town or city organizations, students are able to take their learning "into the wild" (Schwartz, Lindgren & Lewis, 2009, p. 35) and enhance their understandings. Place-based learning offers the opportunity to engage all of the senses. As Helen once told me, "Learning is there every day, everywhere, you have to work against learning" (Recorded conversation, October 25, 2012). I wonder if we were to include numerous people, places, and experiences, outside of those prescribed in curriculum documents, as valid ways of learning and understanding, our students too would expand the parameters of their learning. I wonder if this would not assist in addressing the relevancy piece Myles, Elizabeth, and Jordan all noted was missing.

Potential Future Research Surrounding How Families Feel About Contributing

As I consider future research possibilities arising from this narrative inquiry, one area in particular that I feel would benefit from further exploration is the perceptions and impacts of and on the family and relations who the students were learning alongside in their investigations. On a few occasions Elizabeth expressed her Great Grandma's excitement to share and to be a part of her school project. I wonder what Myles' mom thought about her son's inquiry into her immigration story; what was it that she hoped he would learn? Myles' three siblings were also present for the family trivia and information sharing. Did they have questions of their own? In which direction would they have taken the research? There are so many questions. How did Jordan's profound realizations, thoughtfully articulated in the open letter she penned to the family she does not know, influence her Mom's desire to tell Jordan more of their family story?

> Human lives are not pieces of string that can be separated out from a knot of others and laid out straight. Families are webs. Impossible to touch one part of it without seeing the

rest vibrating. Impossible to understand one part without having the sense of the whole.

(Setterfield in Chung & Clandinin, 2010, p. 59)

In Pushor's & Ruitenberg's (2005) conceptualization of parent engagement, everyone must benefit – the students, the parents and family members, the educators. I have seen through this research the benefit for students and educators of connecting social studies curriculum to students' lives. A further inquiry would provide the field with insight into the "reverberations" of this work for families and in places off the school landscape.

Facilitating This Work in the Classroom

The type of learning environment that is ideal for work involving family and family stories is best described by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner (2011):

This is the setting out.

The leaving of everything behind.

Leaving the social milieu. The preconceptions.

The definitions. The language.

The narrowed field of vision. The expectations.

No longer expecting relationships, memories, words,

Or letters to mean what they used to mean.

To be, in a word: Open. (in Wheatley & Frieze, p. 2)

This sense of openness, as described above, while essential for an authentic learning experience, can only be realized through a thoughtful process that encourages students to explore and develop an understanding of their own realities, as individuals and as members of families, and the subsequent biases that may be unconsciously embedded within these realities. Through the careful deconstruction of terms such as "family" and "normal," teachers invite students to

become awake to hegemonic notions of family and to develop a well-informed and carefully considered frame of reference. In learning about the experiences of others, different from their own in tangible ways, students will then be better positioned to do so with a broad perspective. At the beginning of this project a number of students self-identified that their assignment would be “different,” Jordan included, because of their own unique family structures and dynamics. As an educator, I felt unsettled knowing that students harbour, and sometimes allow themselves to be defined by, these societal constructions of “different” or “bad” that arise from notions such as a “broken family” or “step-family” or other notions that set them apart from the alleged ideal family. What resonated with me is the number of students who voiced this concern; when it came to their families, different was more the norm than “normal.” Simply by addressing these concerns with students individually, and reinforcing that every situation is unique in whole class discussions, an attitude of acceptance began to develop.

When teachers and students consciously attend to the needs of one another in a genuine way, they cultivate a climate of caring and acceptance that encourages sharing. To do the kind of work with families and family stories that this thesis foregrounds, it is important that teachers are willing to embrace and work within the tensions that may arise from the unscripted exchanges which occur in conversations and the sharing of family stories. In acknowledging and addressing the tensions, teachers have the potential to inform student understanding and to challenge the dominant societal discourse around families and family forms. By intentionally contrasting elements of the null curriculum, themes and ideas that are often avoided because they are uncomfortable, with the explicit curriculum that is intended for all students regardless of context, teachers can invite students to consider the range of diverse perspectives and alternative family forms that exist outside of the box of the hegemonic family. Through the exploration of

excerpts of films, consideration of events featured in newspapers and social media, or the reading of selected children's literature, as was a key part of the student introduction to this research, together teachers and students are "called to confront the fact that 'what everybody knows' is all too often not what everybody knows" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.7). During this process, as teachers invite students to deconstruct the messages presented in a variety of media forms,students will begin to imagine the lived realities of others. "Of all our cognitive capacities, imagination is the one that permits us to give credence to alternative realities. It allows us to break with the taken for granted, to set aside familiar distinctions and definitions" (Green, 1995, p.3). When teachers provide these opportunities for critical thinking and reflective practice that are relevant and connected to the lives of students, we "induce [students] to live beyond narrow identities and allegiances" (Slimbach, 2010, p.6). This skill – and this stance in the world - is critical for students as they attend to issues of family and family diversity in social studies and as they navigate all of their studies in a more meaningful, respectful, and respected way.

When, as educators, we embrace this style of teaching and learning, our programs of study will ultimately be directed by the lived experiences of the students. In the role of facilitator, as guides and supporters of the individual process of each student, "it is their stories about their changing lives and experiences that will hold us together and drive the curriculum" (Rieger, 2008, p. 70).

Final Thoughts

I began this work by inviting you to:

> Imagine a curriculum that enables students to explore the personal and relational implications of our ever evolving society. A humanistic exploration that builds bridges to connect with the past by providing a chance for students to trace their ancestry while

> delving into the social, political and economic realities of days gone by – culminating in a holistic and enduring understanding. (Chapter 1, p. 6)

I have told you the story of my narrative inquiry in which I lived alongside students and teachers as they engaged in a humanistic exploration through the Roots project and I have shown you the impact that had for students. I now invite you to move forward into your own humanistic exploration – whether that be through a Roots type project or some other exploration that meets the needs and interests of the students in your classroom.

Because our ancestors always stand with us as we carry forward their stories, I would like to express appreciation for the stories shared with me by Uncle Ossie, Uncle Tom, Auntie Martha, Auntie Marj and Grandpa that helped to shape and guide this work. There are many others, including my Grandma along with other treasured aunts and uncles, who have captured my heart and ears through storytelling. Although their stories do not appear in this text, I am forever grateful for the shared experience.

When I look at Myles, or Elizabeth, or Jordan I now see them in a new light, one that shines on them in a way that reveals more than just their student identity. With the help of this light, I see them as bundles of individual stories yearning to be told within a context of a family. Their families represent “webs” that enrich the curriculum when they are also present in it.

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