FROM IMPOSTERSHIP TO AUTHENTICITY: ONE TEACHER'S JOURNEY TOWARD A CURRICULUM OF CARE

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Abstract

This is a story comprised of many stories. The stories are reconstructions of my life experience and so necessarily capture both light and darkness. Within them, there are also deep shadows. If one looks intently through these shadows, images emerge of one trying to be "teacher." Images of me. Some are more blurred than others, but I believe all are recognizable.

I am documenting my journey into professionalism in this self-study--not the professionalism of teaching, but rather, the profession of *being* "teacher." Is there a difference? Yes, I believe so. Can I prove it? Not yet. That is in essence the central theme of this self-study: to show that I, heretofore an imposter, can function from a position of personal authenticity and professional caring as I interact with my colleagues, my student-learners, and their parents alike. I also seek to interact with my past, my present, and my future from a position of personal wholeness.

My end goal is simple: to develop a curriculum of care which will guide my actions, inform my reactions, and ultimately better my professional practice.

Acknowledgments

There are those of us who walk tenderly through life as if to not disturb those already in transit. As we journey, we cannot but be changed as we allow both the divine and the temporal to both nourish and temper us, creating in us the reality of life and breath and all that is.
(Pugh, 2000)

To my student-learners ... those with whom I have had the privilege of sharing daily life.

To Jacqueline, Stéphanie, and David ... my children within whose eyes dance the lights of a thousand silver stars.

To Dr. Carmen Shields ... my advisor, my fellow-searcher, my friend.

To my dearest Eiliete ... my best friend and wife, my lover, my constant companion of the past 19 years, without whom none of this would have been possible.

THANK YOU !

There are those of us who must walk fearlessly through life as if to disturb those already in transit. As we journey, we cannot but change one another through both the divine and the temporal, nourishing and tempering us into the reality of life and breath and all that is.
(Pugh, 2000)

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CHAPTER ONE: THE ORIGIN AND IMPORTANCE OF "STORY"

Whether writer or teller, the narrator of a story provides further meaning--and even further text--to the story being told. The narrator too has a story, one that is embedded in his or her culture, language, gender, beliefs, and life history. This embeddedness lies at the core of the teaching-learning experience. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 3)

For the purposes of this study, I am he. I am the narrator with the embedded story--my own story. I am documenting my journey into self-listening using a self-study, narrative framework. Through this process of uncovering personal meaning, I explore the concept of authentic care, and I examine its developing role within me and its enriching influence upon my professional practice. At a minimum, I wish to lay myself open, hoping to achieve increased self-awareness. At most, I wish to further embed myself in my own personhood and, consequently, in my professional practice so that my students have the opportunity to have **all** of me present in their memories--not just fragments and disjointed shards. This is my goal and passion for conducting this research: to find myself within my own story so that I can take up permanent residence within it, own it, become it. I believe that only then will care flow in and through me--authentically.

In this first chapter, I explore five stories that have taken up residence within my experience. These stories cross back and forth over time: Some of them have a little blond boy at the middle of them, while others have a much later version of the same lad. They have different contexts and different outcomes; and yet, each one demonstrates and underscores the importance of "story" within my life thus far. Regardless of circumstance, they all play a vital role in the process of my personal meaning-making, which is, in short, the underlying premise of this research paper. Some of these accounts are italicized and indented. As such, these indicate the transferral of a highly personal

attribute: the sound of my authentic voice. Other tales, recounted in narrative style, are not italicized or indented. As such, these stories record my observations of and my interactions with other individuals within my realm of being. They are replete with the opinions, commentaries, and beliefs of these people. It is within these stories that I find that the voice of impostership is deafening to me.

The First of Many Voices

The sun is streaming brilliantly through the white, billowy curtains, illuminating the air around me and the book in front of me. As I pause and look up from the page, I wonder why the bird is sitting so still on the feeder just outside the open window. Had it been listening to my story? Was it listening to my voice? Did it have a voice too? My fanciful reverie is gently interrupted by the silent appearance of an encouraging page within the scope of my gaze. I welcome the page with a smile, and I carefully detach an embossed, silver star from its surface. Glancing up, I catch the amusement in her eyes as my clumsy fingers fight to tame the sticky adhesive brought to life by my slobbery lick. The always-gentle voice and ever-steady hand guide me to the completion of the task. I continue to read aloud as she, knees-to-chin and squeezed onto a small, ladderback chair next to me at the low, redwood table, listens intently, head tilted forward and slightly to the right. Her words, whispered in my ear when my own falter, seem to magically escape through the pleasant smile that is always found on her painted lips.

Even though I have now forgotten its title, this story was the first and best that I ever read, and this teacher was the first and best that I have ever had. I credit this individual, my paternal grandmother, with inspiring me to pursue my calling of "teacher."

I see her as being kind yet firm, encouraging yet realistic, and a keen observer of her environment. With her career having been centered upon the care and education of the many children within her community's one-room schoolhouse, years later she took great personal delight in the care and education of her grandchildren, of whom I was the first.

This childhood memory is one of the earliest, most formative, and most jealously guarded of my life. Even though many years have passed since that day, I can still, with little effort, transform myself into that exuberant little 5-year-old boy whose love of learning was tenderly and deliberately nurtured by the conscientious care of another. This recollection is significant to my personhood and to my life as an educator in terms of both realistic impact and perceived importance. Furthermore, to the degree that I allow it, this past memory speaks meaning into both my present and my future with clarity. I have wrestled for years to be able to listen to the wisdom of this memory from beginning to end. Unfortunately, time and time again, I have not seemed to have the personal endurance needed for this task. This memory is not a sterile, motionless one, frozen in the passage of time. Rather, it is a memory which actively pursues me at regular intervals, leaving me breathless, invigorated, and apprehensive--all within the blink of my mind's eye.

Given this story's dynamic nature, the very act of hearing its counsel does not involve normal listening skills for me. It requires more than even an active, deliberate process of listening. I find it a process of constant give-and-take, personal barrenness, exhausting vulnerability, and courageous accommodation. I need to be able to do more than just hear. I need to be able to listen with understanding. I need to be able to use this acquired knowledge as fodder for the fuel of wisdom that will mold and fire me into the professional whom I have started to become. The person whom I desire to be. Someone worthy of a silver star--a star just like the one given to me by my grandmother so long

ago.

Finishing Well

Around the same time that my eyes were filled with the light of silver stars, I began to sing in public, mostly at social events thought to be in need of entertainment. My experience at one particular engagement has proven to be a significant and guiding memory--one largely unscathed by the passage of time. The first- and secondhand accounts to which I have been privy corroborate my living memory of this event. Having just finished kindergarten the month before, I was taken to the meeting of a local service group within our community. Just before the main speaker, I was to sing. Being small in stature, my grandfather helped me to climb atop a table. From this lofty perch, I began my shameless serenade. Halfway through the last verse of my song, an elderly gentleman, impeccably dressed and comfortably seated in a canvas chair in front of me, shifted his weight and suddenly plunged, bottom-first, through the seat of his chair. I can still remember the look of surprise that registered on his face as he peered up at me in my position of grandeur. I can also remember the polite, pursed lips of the rest of the audience as they struggled to maintain composure. According to witnesses present that day, my only reaction was a momentary furrowing of the eyebrows. To everyone's amazement, I continued to sing, finishing the song as three men hastened to the aid of the compressed individual. Immediately following the victim's emancipatory yell of "Glory Be!", the convenor of the event stepped forward in an attempt to refocus the group. As she turned to thank the little blond boy still perched atop the table, her eyes danced with merriment: *"Timmy, how did you keep on singing?"* was the question, to which a swift and matter-of-fact response was directed: *"Well...what I start, I finish!"* The audience burst into laughter--although at the time, I saw nothing funny about my answer. As I was

lifted off of the table, I clearly remember two things: my grandfather's wide smile and bright blue eyes, running with tears of laughter, and my little hands being engulfed by his massive ones as he returned me to solid ground.

The inherent value of this memory for me is not found in the event itself, nor is it found within the unfortunate mishaps associated with the event. Rather, the importance lies within my initial and ongoing reaction to this experience. Although delighted on occasion to hear the story hilariously recounted by people present that day, I have never forgotten my words of response, for they struck a serious chord within my psyche. I have often wondered why I said what I said. How does one account for such happenings in one's life? Truthfully, in the midst of some difficult situations throughout my youth and young adulthood, I repeatedly returned to the wisdom of this response in an effort to reestablish personal equilibrium and remind myself of noble intentions.

The significance of this memory feeds the fuel of my present inquiry. It is the key that has unlocked a door to an important piece of personal and professional understanding. Over time, I have seen others start and finish many things: courses, degrees, friendships, marriages, and careers. Some have started and finished badly, while still others have started and finished from positions of personal power and coherent understanding. Having done so, they have seemingly managed to walk away with their integrity and their self-esteem intact.

I too desire to finish my journey with personal and powerful understanding. I too desire to guard my integrity and my self-worth. However, over time, I have slowly come to realize that while starting and finishing are admirable activities in and of themselves, they are not nearly as significant as the journey one undertakes while travelling between these two points in time. And so, my journey began at age 20, when I was both a beginning teacher and an apprentice to impostership.

My first 3 years of formal teaching experience found me on two different casual teaching lists as a junior/intermediate French teacher. During that time, I taught most grades and most subject areas in both official languages. By my second year of teaching, I was already referring to myself as an "unconscious expert." It was a term that I had heard repeatedly broached by my grandmother in regard to various students with whom she had interacted over the years. The defining characteristic of such learners seemed to be the comparatively low degree of effort put forth to achieve outstanding results. They were the "natural learners," applauded by their teachers--those for whom school came easily. At the time, I felt that it was an appropriate title for myself; however, in retrospect, this seems to be quite a brazen personal statement for a 21-year-old novice teacher. Since then, I have come to understand that this verbalization was my first sincere attempt at compensating for the accompanying onslaught of feelings of professional emptiness. In his book, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, Stephen Brookfield (1995) defines this lack as "impostership":

> Teachers often feel like imposters. They feel that they don't really deserve to be taken seriously as competent professionals because they're aware that they don't really know what they are doing. All they're certain of is that unless they're very careful, they will be found out to be teaching under false pretences. (p. 229)

In my fourth year of teaching, I was offered the challenge of teaching all grades of elementary French at my former school. I immersed myself in this position, and I was the recipient of much positive feedback from colleagues, parents, and student-clients alike. However, in moments of private reflection, I found myself becoming more and more fearful. The longer that I taught, the less assured I felt of my purported "expert" abilities. Like my grandmother's students of yesteryear, I indeed garnered excellent results. But, instead of little effort, I was working very long hours and battling constant exhaustion.

With nine course sections of study to prepare on a daily basis, I found myself totally discouraged by the associated personal toll. I can remember thinking, "It shouldn't be this difficult. I must be doing something wrong." I continued to struggle silently for the next 5 years, hoping that things would improve.

During this period of desperate solitude in which I searched for new doors of encouragement to open, I stumbled upon what seemed to be, then, a useless key: that of professional hypocrisy in all of its fury.

Realistic Perceptions

It all started innocently enough. The pop machine, situated in the Intermediate hallway, was a constant source of frustration for the older students. Some days it would eat money and dispense nothing; other days, it would simply dispense the wrong item. Being the inquisitive, impatient problem-solvers that grade 7 boys are, some of them figured out that a good kick and shake of the machine prior to the insertion of money would almost always produce a successful experience. And so it was. The students would kick and shake, and the teachers would consequence the kickers and shakers. The issue was eventually brought up at a staff meeting. We collectively agreed upon and communicated to our students the following three-part solution: (a) to remediate future situations of urgency, the vending key would be given to the teacher whose room was situated closest to the machine; (b) student access to the machine would be restricted to lunch hour only; and, (c) teachers on lunch hall duty would provide on-the-spot mediation for any further such behaviours. Being a rotary teacher, I was on lunch hall duty quite regularly. Three weeks after the initial staff meeting, I was just coming on duty when I heard someone kicking the machine and cursing aloud. I rounded the corner to find one of our female teachers, 30 years my senior, in the midst of a

final kick. Behind her, just inside the main entrance, stood a group of her own students watching with a mixture of disbelief and amusement. My momentary shock gave way to action. I quickly approached her, quietly informed her of the student audience, and stated that I would get the key from the adjacent room. She snarled back loudly and derisively, "The classroom door is locked and...who are ***you*** *anyway? Haven't you ever heard of 'Do as I say, not as I do'?* ***Get*** *with the program!" With that, she stormed away, leaving me to face the group of students, many of whom were already offering their comments. A couple of days after the incident, I tried to speak with her. It was to be a one-sided conversation. She bluntly informed me that school rules were only for students and not for teachers. In short, she saw nothing wrong with her actions and reactions. Furthermore, she tersely impressed upon me that to find her at fault would be totally unprofessional on my part.*

I walked away from that interaction feeling numb. That day, I had my first encounter with "blurred vision"--perhaps the result of having my eyes unceremoniously ripped wide open in such a merciless fashion. The dialogue, or lack thereof, bothered me for months after the fact. Was I like her? Was I supposed to be like her? If so, did I have to embrace this ideological positioning? Was this what being "teacher" really meant? This would prove to be the beginning of my intentional search for authenticity.

Had I been listening intently at the time, I'm certain that I would have heard the emancipatory click of a lock which has no choice but to open when the proper key is inserted. Unfortunately, all I did was look curiously through the keyhole at the bright light on the other side of the door--a door whose handle I was not prepared to even touch.

Looking back now, I see that, having borne the brunt of this colleague's condescending and belittling remarks, I was thrown into an ideological nightmare. From

this distance, I can see that this experience failed to support my self-conception of "expert" on three levels: First, I failed to mediate the initial situation; second, I failed to sway her opinion; and, third, I failed to respond appropriately to her intimidating comments. In a mental knee-jerk reaction to this event, I refocused upon a verbalized truism of my birth family: "Practice what you preach." As this phrase rolled around in my troubled psyche, I began toying with a new label: "unconscious practitioner." It seemed to me to be more appropriate on an emotional level at that time. In hindsight, I now realize that this was a significant step toward my eventual self-disclosure of impostership as I moved away from "expert" (already knowing) and relegated myself to "practitioner" (consistently performing). I convinced myself that this ideological shift would give rise to feelings of professional worthiness the more that I practiced my craft. Time would tell.

Time told, and the feelings never came. As I would learn later, I had what De Vries (1993) calls "imposter syndrome":

> These people [imposters] have an abiding feeling that they have fooled everyone and are not as competent and intelligent as others think they are. They attribute their success to good luck, compensatory hard work, or superficial factors such as physical attractiveness and likability. Some are incredibly hardworking, always overprepared. ...They live in constant fear that their imposturous existence will be exposed - that they will not be able to measure up to others' expectations and that catastrophe will follow. (in Brookfield, 1995, p. 129)

It would take another year of intense searching on my part before I found something that could help me in my quest for professional worth. It was then that I encountered the writing of Covey (1989). His work around spheres of influence lent to me the necessary intellectual flexibility to delineate between the important, the more important, and the

truly important.

As I applied Covey's ideas to different elements of my classroom program, I became aware that the resultant insulating effect could just as easily be applied to things other than institutional rigour. I began to look for ways to apply Covey's conceptualizations to myself as a professional person--as an unconscious practitioner. As I cognitively moved through the various roles that I fulfilled at the time, the following fact struck me: The more I reflected on my practice, the more I realized that "unconscious" was no longer an appropriate description of my professionalism.

I returned once again to my personal label. I decided to remove the prefix "un." In so doing, I felt a degree of comfort with the term "conscious practitioner," as it spoke to me of relevance and authenticity. As I raised this new flag above my personal landscape, I found myself staring eye-to-eye with a companion of relevance and authenticity: "care." For the first time in my life, I struggled to adequately define this concept. I remembered that I had been able to see, touch, feel, and hear it in my youth. For years upon years, this past reality had been enough. However, my real and prolonged battle with professional unworthiness had effectively nullified my sense of care. This realization shook me to my core. I had always thought of myself as a caring teacher, and yet I didn't seem to know exactly how I was to be. Looking back on this epiphany, I now recognize that I had repeatedly tried to diffuse the emotional toll of professional emptiness by emulating the authentic care of my own formative experiences. Unfortunately, my efforts were just an imitation of the real thing, and I recall falling sadly short in some key instances. More often than not, I ended up feeling like my efforts to care for those around me were nothing more than a smudge of filth on the side of a garbage pit: hard to recognize and even less inviting. To my shock, I concluded that I needed to learn how to ***authentically*** care for my students.

When confronted with the array of professional deficiencies that this ideological breakdown produced, I was ashamed. At first blush, it seemed inconceivable to me that I could have just simply missed such a foundational concept with which I was already familiar. But I had. It was unavoidable. For the first time in my professional life, I allowed myself to really feel the sting of personal failure.

Year 10 of teaching brought my feelings of professional unworthiness to an apex. I decided to enrol in the M. Ed. program at Nipissing and I started my first course. Much to my consternation at the time, this course did little to heal my bruised self-concept. Rather, it challenged my self-efficacy to a very significant degree. Unfortunately, at that point, I was already greatly discouraged. I considered dropping out of the program; in fact, I came very close to resigning my teaching position. I began to liken my situation to the quicksand pit located at the rear of my family's farm. In such a spring-fed pit, the more one struggles to get out, the more quickly and deeply mired one becomes. Unbeknownst to me at the time, to become more deeply mired was exactly what I needed.

In hindsight, I can now identify one of the roots of this crisis of professional emptiness as being my misunderstanding and misuse of two paradoxical concepts: reality and perception.

> Reality: actual; not fictitious or imaginary...actuality; truth; state of actual existence; genuine; authentic; immovable.
>
> Perception: discernment; sense; awareness; understanding; grasp; an understanding ...[gained]...through the senses; intuitive judgment. (Webster's Dictionary, 1981, pp. 261; 236)

I can here assert that my misinterpretation of these two concepts has had a tremendously negating, albeit unintended, impact on my daily life within the educational field, effectively wreaking havoc upon my efforts to be a consistently committed teacher.

If I were to rank years in accordance with the amount of personal havoc involved, the academic year of 1996-1997 would be highest on my list. It was a year of pivotal importance in my experience, not only because I began my studies at Nipissing, but also, because I began to see for the first time just what education and teaching were all about.

At that time, education in Ontario was in a very dark cycle of its life. Cutbacks at the provincial level had begun to infectiously permeate nearly every aspect of daily school life. The routine trashing of collective agreements and the predictably militant, confrontational reaction of the teachers' unions reached a deafening crescendo in my ears; at the same time, the continuous hostile negativity of public opinion blurred my professional vision to a dangerous point. Feeling both deaf and blind, I felt embarrassed to be a teacher for the first time in my life. Like many in the profession at the time, I, too, was finding it difficult to maintain a positive, balanced approach as I interacted with students, parents, and administration. I fought to remain untainted for I had seen the emotional vacancy in the eyes of some of my tired colleagues as they gave in to such internal vilification. I was determined not to be a casualty.

So it was, in June of 1996, that I decided to transfer to another school within my board in an effort to shake off the ever-tightening grip of professional rigor mortis, whose stale smell assailed my nostrils on an increasingly regular basis. I left my very secure world of rotary French to enter a new phase of my professional experience: that of a mainstream, grade 5 homeroom teacher. Shortly after my arrival at this new school, we were the proud recipients of new provincially driven curriculum documents. In an effort to smooth parental reaction, my administration had decided that a formalized Meet-The-Teacher Night would best serve as a catalyst for mutual understanding. It was here, of all places, that I first recognized the strange bedfellows of reality and perception...in living colour.

Perceived Realities

It was 6:45 p.m. on a crisp October night, and my classroom was already overflowing with a mixture of curious parents, students, and interested bystanders, one of whom was my principal. My presentation began at 7 p.m. and was slated to last no longer than 45 minutes. My program plans were received with murmurs and faint smiles until I entered the area of Language Arts. I explained that the new curricular documents put an undeniable focus on both critical, problem-oriented thinking and on the learners' development of full, meaningful comprehension of various genres. I further pointed out that there was also a significant expectation centered around the exploration of different types of contemporary media and their associated primary resources. In an effort to illustrate these curricular concepts, I brought out some of my then-current students' work from their Reading Response Journals. The highlighted story had focused on an African priest whose freedom had been usurped by the government of the day. The article, sourced from The Toronto Star*, was written to bring attention to the plight of some people in Third World countries whose personal freedoms were not valued. I had randomly chosen five students' responses to the following question: After reading this article, what does the title,* No price tag on freedom*, mean to you personally? As one might imagine, there was a wide gamut of responses in both content and comprehension. After one very meaningful response which brought tears to the eyes of a number in attendance, the mother of one of my boys interrupted and accused me of contriving the answer. She insisted, "No child could write that well in this grade!" When I responded that I had done no such thing, she then demanded to know the identity of the child-author. She wanted to confirm her belief that, if I had not contrived the response, then the child's parents had written it on*

his/her behalf. I stated that the student's handwritten copy, from which I had read, did have mistakes in it, albeit of a minor nature. I also identified the fact that the author's parents were present in the room and, at their discretion, they could identify themselves to her at a later time. My directional response was met with a blast of hostile sarcasm as this disgruntled parent turned her back to me, faced the room full of parents, and continued to express her opinion: "My older, grade 8 boy could not even read this article when Bobby brought it home. I had to sit with Bobby for 2 whole hours, and he only wrote five words in the end." As she turned back to me, she continued, "I can't believe that you'd expect my boy to write about this, let alone read it! Do you know what grade you are ***supposed*** *to be teaching?" After considerable effort at a negotiated understanding, I diffused this objector by thanking her for spending such quality time with her boy. I emphasized the fact that teaching is a three-way partnership and that she was an obvious model of sincere parental care for the benefit of others in the room. In the weeks that followed, I received a number of letters from other parents. Among their comments, they demanded that I treat their children as 10-year-olds instead of "Grade-10-Year-Olds." One mother also wanted to know how I could expect her child, who still believed that Casper the Friendly Ghost was real, to be able to read, understand, and write about real-life newspaper articles? I tried to communicate the importance of such skills to these concerned parents, but often to little avail.*

Since then, I have often considered my untenable position within this battle of reality and perception. I now believe that this whole scenario was rooted in a myriad of socially held assumptions about school and learning, both implicit and explicit. First, I wrongly assumed that an effective public communication of my programming goals would

be sufficient to allay any parental concerns. I had simply assumed that the parents in question would trust my professional judgment in regard to curriculum planning. Second, I failed to recognize the depth of parental perception that it would be "business as usual" within a classroom focused on the new curriculum. Some had evidently not recognized or prepared for the implications of the more demanding curriculum. In fact, some parents openly expressed the expectation that I, as teacher, should act as a shield between the new government demands and their children's increased workload. A few parents also emphasized a definite assumption that homework would be kept to a reasonable level. The difficulty came in trying to understand their view of "reasonable." I knew that many families in attendance had priorities for their children above that of academic development, namely community sports programs. While I made certain that I expressed my support of those activities, I had to hastily qualify my position once I realized that it was being automatically assumed that I would lower my overall expectations in deference to these ventures.

Now, years later, I am still startled by this story. The reality of this situation is embedded within the perception of my learners' parents: In order for their children to have a "good" year, I, as teacher, would need to be tempered in order to combat the unrealistically high expectations to which I had openly alluded in my presentation. The professional reality within which I conducted myself seemed to have little to no value in their considerations. Further, this heightened level of academic expectation had a perceived negative connotation in the eyes of some client-families. Most disturbing to me, however, was the implicit parental assumption that their children **were not capable** of meeting the new learning expectations. Over the years since then, I have had numerous parents confront me, stating that their children could not meet academic expectations due to alleged laziness, poor self-image, and even purported stupidity. Amongst all of these

characters and situations, there is only one disturbing constant: Parental assumptions often dictate children's perceptions. These, in turn, not only frame childrens' memories but also their living understanding of who they can be and what they are about. Of this, I know firsthand.

I Think I Can...I Thought I Could

It was a hot, early-summer morning. I had been in the dairy barn as usual, trying to help out where I could without triggering an all-out asthmatic attack. My early years were spent in this never-ending cycle of wanting to help with the physical chores necessitated by farm life on one hand and wanting to be able to breathe without difficulty and without pain on the other. On this day, I had lasted only 20 minutes before my airways seized, forcing me to return to the comfort of the bottle of my asthma medication. As I sat, waiting for the anticipated relief, I was frustrated and embarrassed. Later that morning, at breakfast, my grandfather suggested that I could help out my father in his small-engine repair shop in lieu of barn chores. I jumped at the opportunity. And so it was. The next day, I appeared at the shop doors dressed in the requisite overalls, ready to work. My father immediately started me cleaning up the shop, moving equipment, and organizing parts. As noon-time came, I asked if I could help by disassembling a tractor engine. I had seen my father do this task hundreds of times. He agreed, and I started. After about an hour and a half, I proudly stood up, waving my father over to my work area. "See Dad? I've finished!" In looking over my work area, complete with little piles of screws, nuts, washers, and gaskets, my father's face registered a look somewhere between annoyance and anger. His words came slowly and deliberately: "Well, you have done it this time! This is a real mess! It is ***NOT*** *good enough. You'd better go back to the house where you belong!" I*

looked at my neat little piles of trinkets, which began to blur as my chin began to tremble. I apologized and begged for lenience. He raised his voice, pointed to the the door, and started to yell about how much extra work I had caused him and how I could not have gotten it right even if he had told me himself. I ran all the way home that day. I remember noticing through the curtain of my tears the gathering of dark clouds in the sky. The sound of his angry voice drowned out all other voices for a time--including my own.

My father's words still sometimes find their way to the forefront of my mind, even now. They were more frequent performers on my mental stage earlier in my career. In fact, writing this story now, I recognize that I repeatedly used this once-debilitating phrase as a catalyzing impetus to spur myself on, both professionally and personally. It also used me. Through my deliberate summoning of this voice, I continually imprisoned myself within my own shadows of lack and despondence. I can now state with some assurance that this memory has been one of the lynchpins in my battle with professional impostership. For much of my career, the phrase, *"This is a real mess! It is **NOT** good enough!"* spoken years before, was the menacing banner of my unwanted future. I redoubled my efforts. I taught in constant fear. I was truly living the life of an imposter.

CHAPTER TWO: OF LIGHT, DEATH, AND HEROES: THE FORGOTTEN MAP

When I seek my identity and integrity, what I find is not always a proud and shining thing. The discoveries I make about myself when I remember the encounters that have shaped and revealed my self-hood are sometimes embarrassing - but they are also real. (Palmer, 1998, p. 29)

Rewind to 1973. I am 5 years of age. My eyes are still reflecting the light of those embossed, silver stars. Life, at this juncture, is very good. I have a hundred or more acres of the family farm upon which I can play and explore; I have a faithful dog; and I have a close-knit family. Unbeknownst to me at the time, the world of the little blond boy was about to change forever.

Light Amongst the Lilies

It was an eerie quietness. In fact, it was totally silent, although I felt sure that I should be able to hear at least my own voice. But every time that I opened my mouth, I gagged and choked. I remember feeling strangely disoriented at first, then that feeling gave way to one of wonderment--wonderment at the flowers, the vines, the rocks, and the cool peace of this place. In looking up, I could see the sun's rays flickering and winking at me. As my eyes began to close, I suddenly saw a familiar hand reaching down toward me. It seemed to come from the light above. It grabbed my collar, and suddenly I was airborne--abruptly ripped out of that cool, strangely peaceful place. I could not fully open my eyes for some time after that for the sun was blindingly bright that day. So, instead of looking, I listened...and I heard the quiet voice of my grandmother as she cried and cradled

me in her arms.

I have often revisited that pond. In fact, for years after that event, I helped my grandparents tend the extensive gardens that bordered this small body of water--as I had been doing so long ago when I was five, full of innocent wonder, and weighed down by red rubber boots that filled with water at the bottom of the pond. To this day, the sight of white water lilies still makes me catch my breath.

Death of The Rock

Located not far from the pond in which I almost lost my life was a rock that inspired me to live. It was almost hidden from view, although it was in plain sight of any visitor to our family farmstead. Squarish in shape and flat on top, it was just wide enough for two people--one little and one big. This rock was the first holy ground of my life. For it was on this rock that I learned more about the world than I ever could have by just exploring it. Upon this rock often sat one of the "rocks" of my young life: my great-aunt. An artist by choice and a seller of fine china by necessity, she was a regular visitor to our farm. And so it was, one day in the late afternoon, that Aunt Helen took young Timmy by the hand and introduced him to what she called the "story-telling rock." This hand-in-hand journey was to become an anticipated ritual every subsequent time that she visited. We spent long hours on the rock, discussing monumentally important things--like how crickets make their songs; and like why grown cows kick up their heels and run full-tilt through the new spring fields every year. It was there that I learned the value of story. Very rarely did we take storybooks out to the rock. Rather, the stories would

emanate from her many experiences told in glorious detail--both good and bad. Soon, I started to share my own stories--stories that were both good and bad. And she listened. And, I listened. And, from time to time, I would even listen to my own voice.

Time passed and, suddenly, Aunt Helen was no longer appearing somewhat magically at the front porch of the farmhouse. I inquired. Sick, I was told. I waited. Finally, on an outing to town, I asked to go and see her.

> *The small, yellow house was within walking distance. I sprinted there, feeling as light as air. I arrived at the quaint door, decorated with a handpainted sign, and knocked. No one opened the door. I knocked again. Then, I heard a voice, faintly calling from within. I went inside, and I was shocked at the lack of light. I had been there just a month before and it had been entirely the opposite: Soft music had been playing; and the smell of fresh oil and canvas had filled the room. Now, all the curtains were drawn, the radio was silent, and the brushes lay motionless in front of the easel. On the lip of this easel sat an unfinished picture. I followed the faded carpet to the rear of the house. She bade me enter. She was lying in bed, propped up with pillows, breathing heavily. I sat on the edge of the bed, not wanting to believe what I was seeing. This once-vibrant lady was so weak that she could barely speak above a whisper. I do not know how long I was there, holding her hands in mine and telling her about the happenings of my day. But abruptly, our quiet communion was interrupted by the sound of my mother's voice, coming to fetch me. It was then that she spoke the final words that I would ever hear from*

her mouth: "Tim, go to our rock. Sit there a while and tell a story for me. I'll be listening."

The day of her funeral, I went to that rock and I told a story. I have been told that I stayed there for hours that day, animatedly talking and waving my arms. In fact, for months after her death, I could be found in the early evening hours of most days, sitting on the rock, telling story after story. My parents gently suggested that perhaps I should speak with someone about my need to be on the rock. I told them that I had to be there--for how else could the stories be told if they were not from the story-telling rock?

As then, I still recognize the importance of story as a vehicle for sharing experience today. However, unlike in my youth, now it is more than just an emotionally necessitated phenomenon. Story is a constant companion to my intellect. And, these many years later, storying is not just an external reflection of the world around me and my reactions to it. Rather, it is becoming an increasingly reflective process of the world within me as well: my internal landscape--the interior wholeness of my character and my aspirations--what I think of as the real me. In essence, this self-study research is another attempt of mine to story my experiences and my life. However, key to this attempt at storying is the understanding that one of the goals of this research journey is to improve myself. By allowing light to penetrate into my own dusty corners, I also hope to improve my professional practice, which I see as an extension of who I am.

"Who is the self that teaches?" is the question at the heart of my own vocation. I believe that it is the most fundamental question we can ask about teaching and

those who teach - for the sake of learning and those who learn. (Palmer, 1998, p.7)

The motivation fuelling this process of personal and professional inquiry is based in the collective and individualized memories of Mr. Pugh...of my ways of being--with and among my students--past, present, and future. Through this intentional journey into personal defenselessness, I aim to become infinitely more willing. I aim to be more incapable of giving less than everything.

Hero of The Rock

I saw it coming--actually barrelling, gathering speed. It was still fairly small on the horizon, but I knew it would be here in under a minute. I had seen it happen hundreds of times. My family farm was at the curved base of a long, narrow concession road. At the top of this road, next to the leather factory, was a gravel pit. It had been the scene of trouble as far back as I could remember. If it wasn't contaminated ground water and dust or unbearably loud noises at all hours of the day, then it was the pack of wild dogs that made their home amongst the pebbly dunes between brutal attacks on local livestock and household pets. As a young boy, there were two things of which I was cautious: the wild dogs--for they had ripped apart my neighbour's leashed dog in plain sight of all of us who were watching helplessly; and the gravel trucks--for I had seen the terribly dessimated remains of animals, both pets and otherwise, after they crossed the paths of these fully loaded monster machines, travelling down the hill and past our farm as if flung from a huge slingshot. And so it was. I was on the story-telling rock,

soaking in the setting sun. I had just seen one of the last trucks begin its descent down the hill. I closed my eyes, and then, feeling startled, I opened them. I listened hard. Over the grazing sounds of the animals in our pasture, I heard a faint sound: drring...drring. I stood up on the rock and strained to see over the tall bulrushes at the end of our lane. There was only one thing that made that shrill sound--little Paul's tricycle bell. Four years of age and full of mischief, Paul was the youngest of three neighbour children who lived down the concession on the opposite side of the road from us. I ran part way out the lane and stopped. Indeed, it was Paul. I yelled for him to go back home. In response, he stopped, smiled, waved, and began to pedal even faster than before. I yelled for my parents...for anyone. But the only reaction from a living thing was the low moo of a cow over the fence as she looked curiously at this creature that was making so much noise. I turned and looked up the road, hoping against hope that the truck had turned onto the lone cross-sideroad seven farms up from ours. It had not. I was immediately nauseated. Mental images of dead dogs that I had witnessed killed by the trucks flooded my vision. At best, if the truck did manage to avoid him, he would be badly injured by flying rocks. To make matters worse, Paul had taken to the middle of the road, probably to avoid the loose gravel along the ditch. I began to run. Me--asthmatic at the best of times--I began to run. I remember thinking that the truck would probably pass the third farm from ours before I could even reach Paul. I also thought it unlikely that the driver would

even see Paul in the gathering dusk until he was abreast of our laneway--by that time, it would be too late. Like most farms, our laneway was fairly long--but this time it seemed to stretch on and on. This, coupled with the fact that Paul kept slowing down to avoid bigger stone, made my heart beat triple-time and my lungs seize in fear. I got to the road just as the truck's headlights were illuminating the reflective lane markers of the third farm up from ours. By this time, Paul had noticed me running and yelling. He stopped, turned his tricycle around, and started to pedal the opposite way...still in the middle of the road. I remember crying out desperately: "Paul...Paul! Don't run away from me!" But, by this time, the noise of the fast-approaching truck was becoming too loud to counter. Now also in the middle of the concession, running at top speed, arms waving madly, I heard the loud snort and whine of the airbrakes and the urgent peel of the horn. All of a sudden, the ground all around me was illuminated--the truck was almost upon me. I could see my shadow on the ground--hands reaching out frantically for the little boy who was bent over his handlebars, still pedalling furiously. I still have no idea how I got to him in time, but my hands connected with him, and without breaking stride, I pulled him and his tricycle into the ditch. I remember feeling the wind and the sting of gravel on my back and my head as I leapt into the water of the open culvert below me. A minute or so passed by--I was still holding onto Paul. Then, I heard Paul's Mom calling his name. Paul looked up into my face, laughed and said, "Dat was fun!!" I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I struggled to my

feet. It took a moment for his mother to see us climbing out of the ditch. She broke into a run and got to us just as I emerged from the culvert, boy in one hand and tricycle in the other. In still-breathless gasps, I explained what had happened. Apparently, Paul's mother had heard the airbrakes and horn and she had come outside to investigate. As the reality of the situation became apparent, she muffled a cry with her hand, thanked me profusely, called me a "hero," and then headed home with the youngster.

I wish that the story ended there--neat, complete, and empowering. But, it doesn't. I made the unfortunate decision to go home and relate the story to my mother.

When I arrived at home, she was upstairs, busy with some household chore. I called up to her and asked her to come down. She countered with a request for me to come up. Instead, tired and out of breath, I sat at the bottom of the stairs and told of the recent event. I could hear things get quite quiet at the part where I related grabbing Paul and jumping into the ditch. I finished, and then there was a long pause. "Anything else?" she asked. "She did call me a hero...," I remember saying, my voice fading hopefully. "Oh, that's a good story. You have quite an imagination. Make sure that you tell the truth, Tim." That was it. Nothing more. There was no talk of it at supper that evening. In fact, when I tried to bring up the topic, I was told to be quiet. No sooner had we started supper than the phone rang. It was Paul's mother. I could hear her voice, talking excitedly. My mother's reaction was minimal at best: "Uh, huh. Oh, how wonderful. Yes, that's nice. We're glad that he is alright." Then the call ended, and we returned to

our supper. I asked if it was Paul's mother and, in turn, I was told to eat and be quiet.

I think of this event now as my first brush with authentic care and impostership. I believe that I demonstrated authentic care when I rushed to Paul's rescue, regardless of personal consequence or hardship--because this was the best course of action for him--the one cared for. The subsequent reaction of my mother--in this instance of emotional learning--my teacher, was unreal, out of context, and I feel unbefitting of the occasion. This memory fails what Noddings (in Witherell & Noddings, 1991) describes as Watson's "occasions of caring": "moments when...teacher and student meet and must decide what to do with the moment - what attitude to take, what needs are present, what to share, whether to remain silent" (p. 168). When I wander back mentally into my student mindset of that time, the dumptruck-near-death experience does not resonate as loudly in my memory as does the reaction of my mother. Years later, I can now identify three assumptions that I think I adopted unconsciously as a result of dealing with this significant reaction. While not earth-shattering in uniqueness, they do, I believe, form one of the pillars of impostership within my practice: (a) Children are not to be believed; their voices are not worthy of note; (b) too much praise for a child can lead to problems with a false sense of worth and personal pride; and (c) adults should not have to explain their actions to children.

While I feel my response toward this young neighbour was genuinely authentic, the seed of impostership was planted in my impressionable psyche. I believe that my mother was an imposter in this situation. It seems to me now that any authentically

caring mother would have reinforced her child's self-worth, praised his courage, and verbalized her delight to others. She was not, however, the only imposter. I had become an apprentice-imposter, and I proved to be a quick study. From this emotionally charged incident, I believe I unconsciously learned the power of producing and maintaining a false sense of care--verbalized appropriately and packaged nicely for public view, but of no earthly good nor merit to anyone else, including myself.

Are children born authentically caring and, over time, learn to be imposters in order to be accepted as citizens in society? Or, is it the other way around: Are children born imposters and, over time, learn how to be authentic care-givers so that they can be accepted as solid citizens? I do not know the answer, and I don't think that a categorical answer will suffice. Rather, if I listen carefully to my own past experiences, I must align myself with the first belief statement. I do so, acknowledging that

> attention is central in the caring orientation...One must engage in the activities of care, preferably under the loving supervision of an experienced caregiver. ... Being cared for may be a necessary prerequisite to learning to care. (in Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 165)

The fact that I feel that I was improperly cared for emotionally prior to and after this situation had no significant impact on my ability to mete out authentic care when I deemed it necessary and important to do so. However, this lack of caring did have an impact upon the way that I internalized this event.

Noddings states that, "internal talk can be facilitative or debilitating" (in Witherell & Noddings, p. 163). I seem to have proven negative aspects of this truth as I modelled what I think of now as imposter behaviour in subsequent years. As I unconsciously perfected this talent of hiding from myself over time, my personal perceptions became the dictates of my personal reality. To a large extent, I see that this particular scenario carried over into my professional life. My desire to rid myself of these underlying assumptions of impostership is, therefore, another landmark of my new territory now--one I can use as I plumb the depths of this unknown land of personal vulnerability and authentic care.

A Glimpse of the Land Ahead

Here, I must admit that my ears have recently been reattuned to the sound of my own voice within my stories of experience. It is a humbling thing to realize that I, as an individual, once valued my own story. It has not been so for a long time. I am now dedicated to reacquainting myself with the narrative of my life. In fact, my roadmap through this new land is none other than narrative inquiry.

Borrowing from the ideas of Pinar (1994) around regressive and progressive analysis and synthesis, I am weaving in and out of my own experience and back and forth across time through some of my own key learning experiences. "It [narrative inquiry] is therefore temporal and conceptual in nature, and it aims for the cultivation of a developmental point of view that hints at the transtemporal and transconceptual" (Pinar, p. 19). In reference to Bruner's description of this mode of reasoning, Witherell and

Noddings, (1991) state, "the narrative mode...leads...to 'good stories, gripping drama, and believable historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequence that mark their course.'" (p. 3). Thus, by using this structure, I am tracking the growth and development of care within my person and within my practice. My main vehicle of analysis is the retelling of stories from my own past experience and the reconstructing of the meaning held there in my own present. Using this two-step process, I can not only make new meaning from my own past experience, I can also build a path forward using this newly constructed meaning as I work to become more authentic in myself, in my life, and in my work.

By exploring many dialogues, experiences, and events which resound throughout my life, I am venturing into what Noddings (in Witherell & Noddings, 1991) calls "executive monitoring or metacognition" (p. 163). The theoretical root of my exploration is found in the historically feminist orientation around interpersonal reasoning, as described by Haan (1978):

> moral dialogue between agents who strive to achieve balanced agreements, based on compromise they reach or on their joint discovery of interests they hold in common. (p. 303)

In defiance of those who would criticize my position in this regard, I would here echo the words of Keller (1986) as an appropriate justification: "We connect, all of us, spaciously, timefully" (p. 248).

This type of dialogue finds its voice amongst several agents who make their home

within the limits of my existence. My familial background, past school-based experiences, critical conversations with colleagues--allies and foes--collectively act as a contextualing milieu within which my own internal voice introduces, deconstructs, and reconstructs my professional self. By manipulating this juxtaposition, I uncover the underlying assumptions and theoretical scaffolding of my current practice and present ways of being. Expanding on Haan (1978), I am, in effect, attempting to gain both personal and professional balance through the compromising act of discovering those themes of commonality which link my past to my present. As Noddings and Witherell (1991) note, "through the poignant grip of story and metaphor we meet ourselves...in our...quest for goodness and meaning" (p. 4). The resulting internal talk, in turn, creates a forward-looking interpretation of past experience which is a springboard for autobiographical telling from which I will leap into my next phase of professionalism. It is from this vantage point that I can complete the long process of authoring, exploring, defining, and ultimately owning a personal curriculum of authentic care.

CHAPTER THREE: OF INTERSECTIONS, ACCIDENTS, VICTIMS, AND WITNESSES

A good teacher must stand where personal and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic at an intersection where "weaving a web of connectedness" feels more like crossing a freeway on foot. As we try to connect ourselves and our subjects with our students, we make ourselves, as well as our subjects, vulnerable to indifference, judgment, ridicule.

(Palmer,1998, p. 17)

To teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced.

(Palmer, 1998, p. 90)

Roadkill

Shortly after the pop-machine-angry-coworker incident, I was the victim of a professional drive-by slaying. At this point, I was now teaching in a grade 5 homeroom. Within this class, I had nine children who exhibited various levels of attentional difficulties. Of these, three were identified by the school system as "slow learners," three had been diagnosed with ADD & AD/HD (Attention Deficit Disorder & Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder), and one had an additional "difficult behaviour" label. I spent an enormous amount of time with each of these children before, during, and after school. My largest amount of time and effort, however, was meted out to the last child in the previous list, the one formally identified as both an ADD / behavioural student and as a slow learner.

This boy's first two reports reflected a grading of "C" in most subjects, largely due, I believe, to the high level of consistent intervention on my part. However, in the

last term, he simply refused to do any work. Not knowing how else to support this student, I informed the parents and the principal of the situation. As part of the collaborative measures agreed upon, the parents secured a tutor for their child. Unfortunately, instead of merely helping him, the tutor, under what appeared to be severe parental pressure and fear for her job, ended up doing the boy's work for him. Within 2 weeks, I confronted the parents with the reality of what was happening. Despite my best attempts to facilitate, the situation continued to worsen. In talking with both the Special Education teacher and the principal, I decided to assign a "C-/D+" to the subjects in which this student had not performed the minimum requirements. In doing so, I hoped that the clear academic reflection of this student would communicate the growing seriousness of the scenario to his parents. Their way of taking notice was to grieve the situation to both my Superintendent and to the Director of Board. When we were notified of these actions, my principal pulled me into his office and advised me, among other things, that "the secret to success in education is to give parents what they want." I was totally disheartened to think my administrator had waited until I was in a difficult situation to fly his true colours. His character became even more evident when his official reaction to this untenable scenario was heard to be, "Tim's a big boy. He can handle this on his own."

Under the threat of a lawsuit against both the school and the board, I was ordered to modify my reporting marks, even though there was no clear board policy on which to base the action. I could not help but feel that all of my efforts with this student and his

parents over the year had been devalued and nullified. This experience left me grossly disenchanted with the system, and I lost all respect for my administrator. I came very close to resigning. Even though I believed in what I had done, I began to experience very severe, rejection-based emotional reactions to colleagues, which seemed a bit too extreme for the situations within which I found myself.

I could not reconcile these emotions, nor could I explain them away. In retrospect, I realize that my desire to be a "conscientious practitioner" played a major hegemonic role in this predicament. Due to my tenacious grip on this ideal, I could not support the party line of giving the parents what they wanted and instead chose that which I believed would be the most realistically beneficial option for my student's long-term learning, even at great personal cost. At the time, I believed that my actions were dictated by an unwavering black and white commitment to my work ethic; however, now, years later, I see the underpinnings of this situation differently. It was not my work ethic that served to goad me into action. Rather, I now believe that my fears of impostership framed my actions and reactions. During the unfolding of this situation, I was, among other things, called "unrealistic" and "inept"--for it was my fault that the child was not motivated to learn and achieve. My worst nightmare had come true. I had been put under the critical microscope of parental and supervisory opinion and found to be lacking. As my father had said so long before: *it was **NOT** good enough!* I stumbled through the rest of the year in a daze, with the echo of critical voices ringing in my ears. I managed to get to the end of June, but, for all intents and purposes, I was just acting the role of

"teacher." I felt my professional heart had been ripped out and laid bare for all to see. For the first time in my career, I was able to put a name to this phenomenon: Professional Hypocrisy--the act of saying one thing while doing another. This stance, that I had already learned to abhor thanks to my pop-machine colleague, was now to be my defining factor as a professional. Understandably, I faced a serious dilemma of arduous, personal significance.

Having just mentally debriefed and put to rest the pop-machine fiasco, I had come to the conclusion that I was not like my amoral colleague--that I did not have to come to the same end--that I had a choice to make: to be vibrant and real--that there was a measurable distance between where I was and professional hypocrisy. So, when I was called "unrealistic" and "inept," essentially a hypocrite and an unknowing imposter, I was, in a word, devastated. Not only was I being viewed in a negative light, but I was also being labelled that which I then both ideologically rejected and fundamentally disliked. I had come to a major intersection in my professional development. I was forced to look back through my shadows--to strain my vision to identify the spectre of an unworthy self. There was one thing of which I was totally convinced: I did not want to be a teacher who was unworthy of the title. I struggled. I debated. I argued the value of my chosen profession. It took me the whole summer to come to the conclusion that I still wanted to both embrace teaching on an emotional level and persevere within it on a daily, practical level. That was, until I unwittingly became embroiled in an accident of monumental proportions. The victim? One of my precious students.

It had been a great start to a new year. I was now in a portable and loving the freedom that this afforded me in terms of drama and music. I had a phenomenal class--28 children who were eager to learn and share their lives with me. And the best part? I was now, for the first time in my career, feeling able to share parts of my life with them. I became known as the storyteller. It was at this point that the value of "story" came flooding back into my everyday life. My first child had just been born. I was excited, and I loved coming to work, more than ever before. I was very comfortable and pleased to see the genuine response of my students to my own story-sharing. I wish I had read the following back then:

> The notion of caring is especially useful in education because it emphasizes the relational nature of human interaction and of all moral life. .... A *caring relation* requires contributions from both parties in the relation. The one-caring, or carer, comes with a certain attitude, and the cared-for recognizes and responds to this attitude. The relation provides a foundation of trust for teaching and counselling alike. (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.6)

It is ironic, then, that the following catastrophic accident occurred within the lane of care, on the road to a place of mutual trust and understanding with my students.

Innocence Lost

> *She always had a nervous-looking smile. She seemed unsure of herself. She told me that she had trouble reading and writing. "I'm worried that I can't keep up." I thanked her for telling me and called her "brave." I assured her that she was*

welcome and related some of the fun activities that we were going to do during the day. She smiled widely. Then, she was gone. As time went on, Tammy allowed more and more of herself to be shared with the class. I had found out that she had had a very negative experience with a primary teacher years before and was, therefore, very wary of teachers in general. As first term came to a close, Tammy's parents began just dropping in at the end of the day to chat. We had had three formal meetings throughout the term regarding her IEP (Individual Education Plan) and were cultivating a very positive relationship centered on Tammy and her needs. Her parents were pleased with her progress, as was Tammy. I was thrilled. Just after the Christmas break, Tammy came in very excited to show me some pictures from her recent trip with her parents. Each week thereafter, Tammy continued to bring in pictures. I learned much more about her from this interactive process than I did from all of her academic records combined. In the middle of second term, all of a sudden, Tammy was not in class. Tuesday went by; Wednesday, then Thursday. No note--no explanation. I inquired at the office and learned that the parents had responded that "Tammy would not be at school for the next little while" when they were contacted regarding her first day's absence. I remember thinking that this was strange. On Friday, I was called to the principal's office. My principal called me in and closed the door. She relayed the fact that she had received a phone call from Tammy's father on Wednesday past, requesting a meeting with her. They had, unbeknownst to

me, been in her office just minutes before me. When my administrator's eyes filled with tears, my heart sank. I was sure that something terrible had happened to Tammy. What I heard next, I will never forget: "Tim, we have a problem. Tammy no longer wants to be in your class. Her parents don't want her there either." I could not believe my ears. "Why? Are you sure? What happened?"--my voice barely above a whisper. My administrator's lips moved again and out came the following: "This is going to be very hard for you to hear. They were told by another teacher that you think that Tammy is a slut." I could say nothing--my voice was silenced and I struggled for composure. She continued, "Can you tell me about this? They are going to phone the Superintendent and register a complaint with the school board. I have until 3:30 p.m. to let them know what I have found out, and then they will make a decision about the course of action to take."

Initially, I was dumbfounded. I sat for nearly 15 minutes, racking my brain in an effort to think of even one instance or event of the past year from which Tammy or her parents could infer that I held this position. I ran and checked my anecdotal records. Nothing. Upon my return to her office, the principal then asked me to relay the conversation that I had had with our resident Special Education Resource Teacher (SERT) a week prior. Still traumatized and now feeling totally numb, I related that he had approached me to check on Tammy's programming goals for her Individual Education Plan. Happy to discuss one of my success stories, I had proceeded to share this student's academic and skill-based progress. All well and good, the SERT then asked

about her social/emotional growth. I related the obvious milestones that I had observed. During this discussion, I explained the value of the pictorial interaction that we had had. He inquired as to my opinion of her family life. I shared my positive impressions of her parents. When asked if there was anything that I needed to address as her homeroom teacher, I responded that I was unsure of how often Tammy was actually at home outside of school hours, especially during the weekends. I shared that I was a bit concerned over the level of fatigue that she sometimes exhibited, especially on Monday mornings. I related that her 17-year-old brother was an up-and-coming hockey player and that her family travelled all over the province on a regular basis. I told him that I had seen pictures documenting her travels with the hockey team--in many places--hotels, arenas, pools, restaurants, hot tubs, and on the way up rock-climbing walls. The SERT began to question the propriety of Tammy being with a boys' hockey team all of the time. I assured him that her parents were one of two couples who acted as team chaperons. He then asked me whether I would feel it appropriate for my daughter to be in a hot tub with a group of older boys. I responded that I probably would not allow it but pointed out that we were not talking of me and my family. I then reiterated that it was my belief that Tammy's family appeared very supportive and intact. The conversation ended shortly afterward with the summoning of the afternoon bell. I had not looked up during this whole recounting. As I glanced up, my principal--a close friend of mine--had taken off her glasses and put her head in her hands. The silence was deafening. The silence was broken by my voice, but it now sounded strangled, almost beyond recognition. This

voice whispered over and over, “Oh, no! Oh, no!”

It is not often that one hears the echo of one’s voice in one’s mind with pristine clarity during or even after the event of hearing and being heard. But this time was different. My strangled words came not in response to my friend’s posture, but rather as a response to this internal echo: *“in hotels, arenas, pools, restaurants, hot tubs, and on the way up rock-climbing walls.*” She finally raised her head and looked at me. Then, she spoke--quietly but with intent. She told me that this appeared to be a professional conversation between colleagues--the information of which should not have been made public. “You could register a complaint against him--you have ample grounds. Tim, I know that you would never speak ill of a student, but this is a serious situation.” For the first time during this incident, I was angry--terrifyingly angry. My face must have betrayed my emotions because she stood up and moved between me and the door. “Tim, you must think carefully before you respond or act. I know this is upsetting, but you need to consider the end result. What is it that you want out of this situation?” As I left a few minutes later, I heard her picking up her phone.

The rest of the afternoon was a blur of activity, filled with the background chatter of happy student voices. In the foreground--that which I could not ignore--was the echo of my own words, once spoken in innocent trust, now twisted into a vicious malignancy. The SERT and I were called to the office at the end of the day. I was already seated in the room when he entered. As my administrator recalled the events of the day, I observed his face--the muscles alongside his jaw began twitching uncontrollably and his eyes

narrowed and became darker. At the end of her monologue, his response, swift and categorical, assigned the blame to me. He reasoned that if I had done my job properly and confronted this impropriety, he wouldn't have had to. He proceeded to counsel me: "If you know something is wrong, you have to confront it head on, not hide from it." I countered his opinion by reminding him that I had no corroborating proof of impropriety. He replied, "If a hot tub full of 17-year-old guys and a little girl is not enough, I don't know what is!" It was at this point that our administrator broke into the dialogue. She told me that I was not to speak with Tammy or her parents until my colleague had apologized to them. She turned to him, berated him for his unprofessional breach of confidence, and then instructed him to write a letter of apology, addressed both to the family and to me. He rose in protest and then left the room without a word. I sat, unable to move for a time. I was racked with guilt and broke down once I got home that evening.

On Monday morning, I was walking by the office on the way to the mailboxes when I heard the end of a conversation. It was my colleague, the SERT: "I was instructed to apologize to you and your wife. I am sorry that you had to hear this through me. I was surprised to learn that Mr. Pugh had not shared his concerns with you before. When I spoke to you, I just assumed that he had already addressed the issue with you." I strained to hear a response. But, it was a low mumble--inaudible. At recess that day, the administrator summoned me once again. I walked into her office and she handed me a piece of paper. Her hand was shaking. It was his letter of apology. At least, it was supposed to be a letter of apology. It was not. It was really a manifest of self-righteous,

moral-sounding overtones in which I was identified as the culprit. Her voice interrupted my racing thoughts. "I wanted you to see this before I ripped it up. This is totally unacceptable." Another letter came my way. This time, it was less strident but still assigned blame for the situation on my "hesitancy to address issues of impropriety in a timely manner." There was also a statement that this would be the final time he would discuss this event. It was over. For him, at least.

Tammy returned to school later that week; but, in accordance with her parents' wishes, she was transferred out of my class. Ironically, she was to be a part of the self-contained Special Education class--her teacher was to be the SERT. I was wholly undone. I could not concentrate, nor could I make emotional sense of this development. That week, I went to see my administrator a number of times, always with the same request: to meet with the family, Tammy, and herself in order to set the record straight. I was informed that the parents had set down a condition of Tammy's return to school as being that no one was to speak of this incident again. So, much to my continued horror, no one did. The bleak stares and quiet whispers of students around me while out on recess duty were enough to induce instant headaches. Recess duty--that had been one of our key times of connection: Tammy would walk beside me, happily talking of her family's adventures. I missed that. I missed the real relationship that had been built on mutual trust. Weeks went by, and I attempted to say "Hi" to Tammy while on duty. She said nothing. She didn't have to--her sad, once gleaming blue eyes were now dull and dark with pain and embarrassment. The rest of the month went by agonizingly slowly.

The day arrived when a parent came up and knocked on my portable door at 8:00 a.m. As I opened the door, I realized that this conversation was going to be full of more bad news. Without really looking me in the eye, this kind lady explained that she thought that I should know that "all of the parents at the hockey rink have been speaking badly of you." As gracefully as I could, I thanked her for her concern. I later learned from another source that I had been the hockey parents' favourite topic of derision for weeks. For other teachers, this would have been an uncomfortable blip in their experience. For me, it was my unravelling. I knew that the reputations of the town's teachers were made or broken at the local hockey rink. I had worked hard, and I had always enjoyed a good reputation as a teacher. I was well-known, for I had taught in two of the town's elementary schools. I was finished. I knew that I could not recover my reputation. I knew that my character had been called into question.

It was a clear-skied Tuesday morning--some six weeks after the initial attack on my professional character. There was a quick and low knock at my door. My principal walked in. She sat down on the edge of the desk and looked at me. "Tim, you are not going to believe what I have to tell you. I just received a call from Tammy's Dad. She wants to return to your class. Apparently, she does not like being in his room--she feels uncomfortable. Daddy supports the change but Mommy is very upset. I wanted your input because you also have to allow her back in." My heart skipped a beat as I assured her that Tammy would be welcomed back without issue. She did return...the following day, just for the afternoon. The other kids were extremely excited to see her and I

welcomed her back warmly in front of the class. She seemed pleased, yet guarded. She attended faithfully every day thereafter until the end of June, but things would never be as they once were. There were no more conversations unless I initiated them. Instead of long, excited descriptions, there were only short, tersely worded replies. There were no more parent drop-by meetings after school--they remained in their truck, just outside of my classroom, behind glass, watching me. There were no more pictures. And I continued to walk alone at recess.

Reflecting back to this very dark season of my teaching career, I have often considered the accident/victim analogy. This whole event was birthed in innocence on my part. It was, for lack of a better word, an accident--a terribly disturbing, agony-inducing accident. Although I carried the guilt and shame of this incident for years after, I have come to realize that I carried no intent of harm or malice toward my student. I think my fault was in trusting my colleague. In my mind at that time, his motivations, verbalized intent, reactions, and actions smacked of egocentric babbling. Now, in retrospect, I realize that my journey out of impostership--which had just begun around the time of this failure--is a key to my understanding of this situation. At that time, having recently reached some fairly substantial conclusions about myself, my professionalism, and the fact that I wished to be an authentically caring teacher, I was in a mindset of trying to seek out and establish healthy relationships with colleagues and students alike. Due to this new position, I believe that I trusted too easily. I did not consider how my truth could be someone else's untruth.

Now, years later, having digested much of Noddings's work, I have come to the conclusion that mutual trust begets discernment, and in turn, discernment gives birth to authentic care. I now believe that I know what "mutual trust" looks like and feels like. I won't easily make that same mistake again. If only I had read Witherell and Noddings (1991) at the time: "I suspect that we cannot teach the skill of discernment directly. It develops in close relationships over time" (p. 166). For a long time, I thought of Tammy as the only victim of this accident. It had been her reputation, her family's reputation, and her self-esteem that had been obliterated. Not until the sister of the SERT came to me some time later during a social event and queried me as to why I had resigned my position at the end of the year did I realize that I, too, was a victim. I, too, had lost my reputation; I, too, had my character brought into question; I, too, had endured a terrible loss of professional and personal self-esteem. For the second time in my life, I was a victim. My mental stage now had one more shadowy resident amongst its visiting lecturers.

Now far on the other side of this event, I am understanding that I was also a witness. In the present, I remain more a witness than a victim. Living through this accident, I proved what Noddings claims: "I should make it clear that interpersonal reasoning (the act of being marked in relationship by attachment and connection) does not guarantee an ethical result" (in Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p.163). I was not and still am not comforted by the realization that I was victimized by this accident of another's misguided pronouncements. I am, however, comforted to know that this accident

occurred as a result of my intentional steps away from professional impostership, however small the steps were at the time. At least I was moving forward. At least I was striving. I have learned to be content with the nature and outcome of this event because it has informed my personhood to a great degree. I can now confidently agree with Noddings (1984): "Sometimes conflict (coming out of care) cannot be resolved and must simply be lived" (p. 55).

The Significance of Ashes

It was after the water lilies and the demise of the rock, but before I forgot the location of all the silver stars. As usual, I was helping my grandparents take care of our extensive farm gardens; and again, there was to be an accident of monumental proportions. We had been working all afternoon in the hot sun. I had sat down for a rest next to my grandmother in the shade of the lilac trees on the north side of our property.

> *The sun was beginning to set, and I gazed up at her thoughtfully. Gone was the brown hair; it was now gray. Gone was the ever-steady hand; in its place was an older version, which trembled ever so slightly without provocation. I looked closer. Oh yes, I still could see the bright eyes; yes, they were still there. And, the voice--the always-gentle voice; yes, I could still hear it without having to close my eyes first. "What are you thinking, young man?" Her playful question jerked me out of my deep thoughts. "Nothing too much," I replied mischievously, "Are we going to head in soon?" "I would like to finish the front garden--your grandpa cannot do it anymore with his bad knee." "I'll look after it; I'm not tired yet."*

"Thank you, Tim. You are so good to me. I'll start cleaning up back here and then I'll come and help." And so it was. Tim, heading off to the front of the farm, carrying his responsibility squarely on his shoulders. I worked quickly and quietly. In no time at all, every weed was pulled, bushes were trimmed, and the soil was turned over. As I straightened up, I noticed it for the first time. A very tall weed , whose foliage blended into the yew tree at the far northeast corner of the garden. "That will never do. I must get that out of there." Easier said than done, I struggled to get behind the massive yew tree. I remember thinking that this weed was in a very peculiar place - it had no other plants around its immediate vicinity and it seemed to be hiding from my searching eyes. I got to work. After a few attempts, I realized that I could not pull this weed out as I had done with all of the rest. Instead, I resorted to cutting it down from its original three-foot height to a more manageable eight-inch stalk. I then proceeded to loosen the dirt from around its base. Finally, its stubborn roots gave way to my insistent yanking. As I exited the garden, I surveyed my work--excellent, if I said so myself. From behind me, I heard a loud gasp. I turned and there she was, coming to help. "Well, Grandma, I just finished. I have done okay, see?" I paused for effect. "I even managed to pull out this big, nasty weed--man, it was tough to get out--but, the garden looks better now!" Slowly, she turned her eyes away from me and glanced around the garden, returning her gaze to the pile of roots at my feet. "Yes, you did a good job. Thank you. And this, (pointing to the "weed"), this must have taken

you a good long time. Thank you for working so hard. Let's go in and get a drink." I happily picked up the root and flung it over the fence into the refuse pile. It was then that I noticed the bright eyes filled to the brim with tears. "What's wrong, Grandma?" My voice was small and quiet. Equally quiet, she explained that the big "weed" was really a European Ash--a gift given to her by a friend who had been a visitor to the farm just after the war. She had grown it from seed and was planning to transplant it to the back garden at the end of the season. I lost my voice. But my tears flowed. I stuttered and stammered about not knowing-how sorry I was. The once brown-haired head tilted forward and slightly to the right, as it had done so many years before. The trembling hand found its place on my shoulder and her words, whispered in my ear, seemed to again magically escape through the weary smile found on her faintly painted lips: "Don't cry. It was only a tree. You and I have had a busy day--let's go inside now. We'll read a story before supper."

It was not until I was a teenager that I learned the details of the ash tree. The seed had been a gift to my grandmother from her younger sister--an army nurse in World War II--upon her return to Canada after the war. Aunt Rita, whom I had never known personally, died of cancer just 2 years before my birth. The tree was my aunt's reminder that good always comes from bad. After my grandmother related the story to me, I felt obliged to once again apologize to her for my actions. In response, this dear lady, now in her 60s, looked deep into my eyes and said, "It was only a tree, Tim. Just remember that

all things have value--your job is to recognize it." In her characteristic way, Grandma then closed her eyes, leaned back in her rocking chair--1 rock, 2 rocks--opened her eyes, smiled, slowly got up, and poured us two more cups of tea.

As I reconsider this story now, I see that, long ago, I experienced my first "accident" on the road toward mutual care and understanding. But it was very different than my experience with my SERT colleague. I watched the aging victim of this accident turn aside from her own feelings and opinions and give back something good for bad. In this case, I feel I was witness to a miracle, authored by authentic care. I believe I did recognize it then, but know now that I forgot it soon after.

Little did I know at that time that her wise advice would one day serve as a key to the lock on the hard-to-see gate which opens to the path of true personal and professional authenticity. That day long ago I learned the value of a plain ash tree. I was then better able to understand the significance of ashes when I met Helena some 20 years later.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE HEART OF THE MATTER

So the woodcarver resists people's efforts to name him from the outside in. With simplicity and clarity, he claims the right to name himself from the inside out....When we fail to take this first, critical step of fending off projections and reserving the right to name our own truth, we become lost in eternal smoke and mirrors and cannot even find the trail ahead of the path into our inner lives.

(Palmer, 2004, p. 103)

Students are infinitely more important than the subject matter.

(Noddings, 1984, p. 176)

My first indication was the preemptive visit by the Special Education Teacher to my classroom during the middle of June. The second telltale sign was the words that my principal of the time spoke in tones of dire seriousness: "She has only been here for a year and a half. We cannot get any special funding for her--her parents will not allow us to test her. I know that you can handle her--she won't survive with anyone else." Mystified, I went to read her Ontario Student Record (OSR). There was very little in the file, save for the report cards of the previous year and a few immigration papers. However, from my colleagues' words, I pictured a student who had difficulty learning, perhaps to the point where she would be well behind others in the class or might have behavioural problems. And yet, between those official-sounding lines upon which most of us educators sometimes dance, there seemed also to be evidence to the contrary. To say that I was intrigued was an understatement. The first day of classes arrived, and I held my breath. Looking back now, I believe that I did not exhale for a long time.

In the Shadows

She entered the room and immediately ran awkwardly to the opposite corner of the room, arms flailing. She stood facing the wall, rocking and humming. I approached her, offered my hand and said quietly, "Good morning, Helena. Welcome to class. I am so happy to see you." My outstretched hand and gentle greeting brought a piglet's squeal from her throat, at which point she abruptly turned her head toward me and squinted, as if blinded by the sun. "G-g-good morning to you, sir. My name is Helena. I want to sit near the front." Nodding my head in agreement, I led her to a desk and chair, second from the front, in the middle of the room. She put her bright pink Barbie backpack on the chair and suddenly dropped to the ground, clicking her tongue and slinking under the desk. She proceeded to grip the back legs of her desk in a white-knuckled fist, all the while staring at the desk directly behind her. It was then that I noticed them-- the other 33 students in my grade 7 homeroom. They were chatting and choosing seats, as if nothing unusual were taking place. I decided to leave her where she was, clicking and gripping. I turned my attention to the announcements, which had just begun. After our opening exercises, during which she rocked to the rhythm of "O Canada," I began by introducing myself. I was new to this school. This was to be our collective home over the next 10 months. I asked them to write down their expectations of me as their lead learner. I also asked them to think of and record some personal and academic goals for first term. All of a sudden, it

was as if someone threw on a switch: She was off the floor, sitting in her chair, pencil in hand, writing furiously, head bent so that her nose almost touched paper and desktop. She finished much later than everyone else. I collected her paper when she loudly put her pencil back in her desk. I couldn't believe my eyes. She had written almost two double-sided pages--her written script was impeccable in format and Eastern European in cursive style. Every word was slanted perfectly to the right; every letter was perfectly attached to the next; and the phrasing and flow of the sentences was more akin to those of a student in grade 11 or 12. Lunch time came. She stayed, ramrod straight in her desk, unmoving until I approached her and pointed to her lunch box. What she did next, I had never seen before. Each piece of food was unwrapped and methodically placed in some all-important order out on the desk, atop the large dinner napkins that appeared mystically out of the depths of her Barbie backpack. Once all had been arranged, she began to eat. Food half in and half out of her mouth, drooling, and rocking--all this tested my composure. I glanced around and realized that all of the students had turned away from her.

This--the beginning of my first day with Helena--was also the first instalment of a long and intense journey toward intentional and prolonged professional authenticity and care. Prior to this experience, I cannot identify a point in my career at which I was able to maintain my level of authentic care for any extended period of time. I now believe that this was partly due to two factors: first, my lack of understanding of the true nature of

care and personal transparency; and second, the pressures of impostership--systemic conformity, political correctness, and unqualified assumptions--as they impacted my practice on a continual basis. I did not seem to have the personal fortitude then to do battle consistently and so could not maintain authenticity and care over the long term. In retrospect, as I consider the impact of Helena upon my practice now, I realize that she was the first student in my career whose nature--whose whole way of being--demanded nothing less than an authentically caring response at **ALL** times. Her needs, some perceived by me and some realistic, far outweighed my need to **feel** authentic. I could not trivialize her situation, nor could I explain it away--I could not meet her with less than genuine care. Quite simply, I had no time to be anything but authentic. To act as an imposter in this situation would have taken too much time and energy away from this amazingly complex individual. She was, in the words of Noddings (1984), "the one-cared-for" and I was, finally, becoming the authentic "one-caring."

> "*Mr. Pugh, come quick!" The breathless voice suddenly appeared at my classroom door. "Helena is throwing her lock at people!" I could hear her before I saw her. Shrieking in a strangled sort of way, she was punctuating the air with bursts of inane laughter and mumbled words. "Helena, stop. Helena, I said stop." My voice was calm--not anything like my insides. "Why don't you come back to class with me? You can read your book and rest." No response. The lock became airborne once again, and junior-high bodies scattered frantically as the metal object ricochetted off of the walls. I tried a different approach: "Helena,*

remember that you wanted me to listen when you talked? Well, you need to be polite too. I am asking you to stop. Do not be disrespectful." Suddenly, her head was smashing itself against the lockers, "I cannot be here...I cannot be here...I am very sorry." Her voice began to tremble and fade away to nothing. I put my hand on her shoulder and pointed: "Let's go, you and I." "Yes, teacher." With that, she grabbed my hand and led me back to the classroom. She spent the next thirty minutes reading, rocking, humming, and mumbling to herself.

I recorded all of these events in my daybook and headed to the Special Education room at 4:00 p.m., looking for help and guidance. When I shared what had happened earlier in the day, I was told that there would be a call going out to our area's CYW (Child and Youth Worker). It was also confirmed that Helena would have to be suspended from school for her dangerous behaviour. The principal enacted the consequence that very afternoon. She would be gone for 2 days. I remember finally exhaling and looking at the calendar--it was the third week of October.

Light Amidst the Shadows

"*We need to talk....about Helena." I began. Thirty-three pairs of grade seven eyes locked, unwavering, onto mine. Every student was listening. "I am concerned that we all find ways to take care of Helena and help her throughout the days here at school. I am also concerned for your physical safety and your emotional well-being. We all know that she can be very unpredictable and very disruptive, and I wanted you to be aware of some coping mechanisms that we*

could try to use during difficult situations."

We had done this many times before--the "Circle of Fire," as I called it. We used this circle as a safe place in which we could talk about our concerns and our hopes; it was a forum where we dialogued about difficult academic and interpersonal issues. So the fact that I had brought up Helena as a topic for discussion did not strike anyone as strange. What happened next, however, was strange--strange in an affirming kind of way.

"*Oh, Mr. Pugh. We know all about Helena. We know that she can be weird, but there are a few of us who know how to handle her in different situations. She's sorta' like the class pet." "Yes," a second voice concurred, "I don't mind her quirks--it keeps things kinda' interesting. I just get worried when she is violent."*

And so our circle continued. We brainstormed; we shared stories; we laughed, and some of us became really serious--serious about caring for this very unique individual. In my position, I felt it my responsibility to model caring behaviour in this regard. I shared numerous coping strategies with the students--all aimed at caring for her. It was then that the tall, gangly one--the forever shy one--spoke up for the first time: "I would rather just be her friend, Mr. Pugh. What she really needs is a good friend." Simple. Plain. Smart. And...authentic. I was truly astounded. I had not expected this level of maturity from students in grade seven. I thanked the shy one and I asked for more input. I waited, but no one else spoke. It was over. The circle of fire was extinguished. And, the next day, Helena returned, right on schedule.

As was my practice, I stood at my door and greeted each student as they entered

the room that morning. Helena tried to avoid my gaze as she went past. I turned to say "Good morning" and someone tapped my shoulder. It was the CYW. She had just arrived and wanted to drop in to see Helena. I stepped aside to let her in, and I was greeted by a bark--a sharp, yippy bark. Almost simultaneously, one of my boys called my name. I turned and saw Helena on her hands and knees, licking the shoes of the unfortunate boy. He was cornered. He was between a table and the wall. She had crawled toward him and backed him into the corner. I was not overly shocked, although the CYW had a look of half revulsion and half panic on her face. I quickly intervened. I diverted Helena's attention by asking her about her homework. The boy escaped, returned to his seat, and put his head on his desk. The CYW was frozen--transfixed. I tried to explain to Helena why her actions were not socially acceptable. She started to cry. Suddenly, the tall, gangly one came over, took Helena by the hand and, whispering in her ear, took her to the back corner of the room where they sat down to look at a book. The CYW cancelled the rest of her day's appointments and stayed. She and I sat down at lunch time to speak with Helena. "Why were you on the floor today, when everyone came to school?" The rocking began: "I wanted to say that I was so very sorry. I know that boys like dogs and I want to be his friend." "Oh, I see. But, why did you lick his shoe?" "It was for me the most humble thing I could do." The rocking stopped and the clicking started. "Teacher, do you know that a dog is man's best friend?" "Yes, Helena, I had heard that. I had a dog when I

was little. She was a very good friend to me. Her name was Peg." There was silence. The clicking stopped and, abruptly, her gaze left the tabletop. Fixing her eyes and furrowing her brow, she looked directly at me for just a moment: "Then, you see. I WAS right!" She was motionless--for the first time all term--totally still. No tics. No noises. No twitches. But as quickly as she had looked up, her gaze once again returned to study the false woodgrain of the work table, upon which sat her Barbie lunch box with its array of napkins and half-eaten food. Later that afternoon, I went over to the boy with the very clean shoe: "Daniel, she was just trying to be your friend. And she said that she was sorry that she hit you with her lock in the hallway the other day." To my surprise, his eyes welled up with tears. In a halting voice, he said, "Oh...Is that all? I was afraid that there was something wrong with me. I didn't know what to do. Mr. Pugh, she was scary!" I reassured him and thanked him for being calm. At the end of the day, Daniel walked over to the classroom door and waited, looking in my direction. I was heading the same way, escorting Helena to meet her walking buddy. "Bye, Helena. See you tomorrow." Those simple words, spoken so kindly by this 12-year-old boy, were met with a shy glance and a wide grin. It was the first time that I had ever seen Helena's smile. And, within her eyes, for that one instant, I thought that I saw a gleam of light. After all was quiet that day, I sat down at my desk, head in my hands, and I cried.

I am not sure when I realized it. It could have been that same week or the one after. I would surely have missed it had I not journaled the events of that day. I remember thinking that it was epiphanic: Within our Circle of Fire, we had explored the concept of care; and now, suddenly, I was witnessing authentic care--meted out by my students. I was humbled, and, at the same time, excited. Noddings (1984) states:

> Caring is largely reactive and responsive. Perhaps it is better characterized as receptive....Caring involves stepping out of one's own personal frame of reference into the other's. When we care, we consider the other's point of view, his objective needs and what he expects of us. (pp. 19, 24)

They, my students, were doing just that: caring. And, wonder of wonders, I was learning from them.

Sifting the Shadows

> *I had no idea who he was, and yet somehow, I knew him. I was sitting inside the entrance of the mall, waiting for my daughter and my wife, when I noticed him. Neck hyper-extended, facing the wall, eyes fixated on the ceiling, and rocking heel to toe...**rocking...ROCKING.** Unabashedly, I continued my observation. Out of the store to my left strode a tall, thin lady, followed by a shorter, kerchiefed lady. Behind them, travelling awkwardly, came none other than Helena. I watched as the tall lady stopped abruptly in front of the man, said something in a low tone, and then turned to Helena, speaking loudly, "Haide! Du-te acasa!" Even though I*

could not understand the words at the time, the impact of the phrase was clear. Both Helena and the man began to pull at the hair above their respective right ears. He stopped rocking but made a strange, guttural noise, clearly directed at the tall woman. Helena began to click loudly. Immediately, the elderly lady grabbed Helena's arm and shook her roughly. There was a squeal, and they were off --following the tall, thin lady. I had just "met" Helena's family. One week later, on a Friday at 3:30 p.m., I found myself, along with the CYW, the SERT, and my administrator sitting across from this man and his wife for a parent interview. I had been counselled that I would have to control the interview, not allowing it to go for more than 30 minutes, at which point my administrator had to exit. As they entered the room, I was struck by the fact that he was walking ahead of the tall woman. He introduced himself as Helena's father. I was surprised to see that he was courteous, articulate, well-dressed, and very calm in appearance. In halting English, he explained that both he and his wife were university graduates and had been employed by the Romanian government: he in electronics and his wife in chemical engineering. During the violent civil unrest in Romania, they awoke one night to find that their home had been set ablaze with them in it. They fled, taking nothing except the clothes on their backs and some money and books that they had managed to grab during their hasty exit. They travelled to Russia, where they stayed in hiding for almost a year. Then they immigrated to Montréal, where they stayed for 2 years, looking for work. He went on to explain that they had moved

to our area after his wife had found a job nearby. He added that he was still unable to secure employment within his field of expertise. His wife then abruptly interrupted and turned the discussion to Helena: "For fun, Helena reads encyclopedias and dictionaries--we have many. It is very hard for her sleep at night. She sneak book into bed and reads--no light. She not playing outside because she afraid of storms. We want her learn in a normal class. She was very happy child until the fire." I interrupted the disjointed monologue and questioned them about the fire. With no outward sign of emotion, her father stated matter-of-factly that Helena, then a young child, was dropped and fell head-first down a long flight of stairs during their escape. According to their recollection, she had not cried afterward. They had no time to stop at the hospital as they believed that they were being pursued by the Romanian Secret Police. Once in Russia, they had no access to healthcare. I also found out that, while in Montréal, Helena began having seizures. She was taken to a neurologist, and he did a brain scan. The father then produced a neatly folded paper: a doctor's report. They had never understood the report, since it was totally in French, but thought that it was important to keep. I was able to translate the report. In it there was a professional opinion that Helena had suffered extensive brain trauma in the past. I glanced at the clock: 5:30 p.m. I had not even noticed my administrator leave the room. I had been totally engaged. It had taken 2 and a half hours, but much was starting to make sense.

The Circle of Trust

It had been snowing and blowing. The wind had been howling constantly, and I had repeatedly gone looking for Helena. I had partnered her with the gangly, gentle one in the hope that she could successfully get to rotary classes without too much difficulty. It had been working well until the weather changed. First, there was the emergency call over the PA: "No one can find Helena. She was in class just a minute ago." I found her--cowering behind the pop machine in the Intermediate hallway. She had been "hiding" from the sound of the wind. Then, there were the frantic eyes of two of my girls in my doorway: "Mr. Pugh - come quick - something's wrong!" There was Helena, literally flattened, face and stomach against the wall, moaning and inching her way toward my classroom door, clutching her Barbie backpack. I unpeeled her from the wall and never sent her into the hallway again during rotary class change. Time progressed, and finally THE day arrived. We were going to an outdoor education centre for a winter history program. I had been cautiously negotiating with her Dad and Mom for 2 weeks, hoping that they would allow Helena to go along. They had concerns about terrorists, possible bombs, dangerous weather, and Helena being afraid. The bus had arrived, and it was just ready to pull away. Suddenly, from out of the snow, they appeared. They stopped at the corner of the school. I disembarked the bus. A plain brown paper bag was thrust into my hands. "Her food." Simple and straightforward. I guided Helena to the bus and boarded. I looked out the

window and there he was--rocking and twitching--and trying to wave goodbye.

I have often recalled this scene in my mind. He must have been terrified. I know that he truly cared for her. I believe that he sensed that I truly cared as well.

All the way there, Helena had her head parallel with the bottom window frame, face to the sky, intently watching the clouds as they rolled above us. I tried to talk with her about anything other than the weather, but it was to be of no use. "Cumulus, alto-cumulus, atmosphere pressure--there is a storm out there. I will have to go back home." I could hear her mumbling. I now knew that I need not respond. She was just processing in her mind what she saw and heard. I had plans for us today. We were going to have fun. We arrived and promptly went on a snowshoe hike. Getting on the snowshoes was a feat in and of itself. She alternated between shrieks and giggles. Once in place, she was continually looking behind her at the marks she was leaving in the snow. Constantly giggling under her breath, she fell more than she walked. A number of students took turns helping her. Finally, she refused to get up. The snowshoes came off. She and I walked back to the lodge. Inside, another group of visitors was preparing for a cross-country ski challenge. Helena seemed very interested, so I donned a set of skis. She covered her mouth and laughed politely. Outside, I fell into step with the group of students as they went around in a well-worn circle, practicing various techniques. I looked up to wave and she was gone. Frantically, I jumped out of my bindings and ran inside. I found her: in the back corner of the room, crying. I

squatted down beside her and, as she rocked, she said: "Daddy and Mommy said I am too silly to do anything outside." "Come." I heard my voice and I saw my hand reach out. To my amazement, she took it and stood up. "Let's learn something new so that you can tell Mommy and Daddy--they will be so excited." Her eyes locked onto mine. "I cannot do it. They said I cannot." Her voice faltered, and the tears flowed once more. "If you can't do it, I will not tell them that you tried. I think that you can!" The eyes met mine again. That light was there again--like it had been that time before when she had broken into laughter. I showed her every move in minute detail. I showed her the well-worn circle with its two tracks: one for the right foot and one for the left. She placed her skis in the depressions and pushed off. She slid about two feet and then fell. I helped her up and, to my amazement, she continued right around the circle. I took up my position in the middle of the circle, ready to catch her if she should fall. She did not. Slowly and steadily, she inched her way around the circle. As she came abreast of her starting point, marked by a red mitten, she straightened up and looked proudly at the circle that she had made. There it was. She could see her success. I cheered and clapped. More giggling ensued, but, instead of the customary shrieks, it bubbled into laughter. Just then, some of her classmates came out to ski. All smiles, they approached Helena. "L-l-look at me. I can do it!" she said proudly. "Way to go!" "Awesome!" These children's responses still echo through the halls of my memory as a testament to this amazing sense of

discovery. To this day, I have never witnessed such joy and excitement at school. During the ride home, Helena did not once look out the window. In fact, instead of sitting beside me as she had done just hours before, she took the seat beside the gentle, gangly one and was still talking about her adventures when we pulled into school's lot at 4:00 p.m. There they were...waiting. One standing still and the other rocking ever so slightly--in the falling snow.

Now, years later, I have come to view this particular experience as a foundational cornerstone in my efforts toward developing professional authenticity and care. I continue to consider the veracity of my conclusions. Indeed, my interactions with Helena mark the one time in my career when I believe that my caring was palpable and demonstrable in my own mind's eye. It was there, for the first time, that I was able to qualify the nature of authentic care within my practice--the selfless act of caring **for** a person rather than just caring **about** her.

> "Caring about" is a poor second cousin to "caring for". "Caring about" always carries with it a certain benign neglect - one is attentive just so far - assents with just so much enthusiasm, contributes money and goes on to other things. ... "Caring" requires engrossment, commitment, displacement of motivation and attainable goals. (Noddings, 1984, pp. 112, 113)

The childhood trauma of the fire, the accidental head injury, the fleeing to safety, the loneliness and isolation, the fear of everything (both real and imagined)--these were the collective ashes--the remnants of Helena's life experience. It was within these ashes

that she sat on a daily basis, sifting--trying to make sense of the realities of her existence. I think now that I joined her there. I could not draw her out. For the first time in my career, I did not even try. Her needs demanded nothing less than my total presence--there with her, amongst the ashes. It was there that I discovered a treasure of immeasurable worth: myself: my authentic, caring self. This was not the first time that I had been a witness to authentic care. Indeed, many years before, near the beginning of my career, my interaction with another student named Aaron also brought this notion of care and authenticity to my mind's stage. While Helena is the individual whose very ways of being led me down the lane of care towards trust and understanding, Aaron is the student whom I will forever remember as the lightning rod in my initial awakening to the concepts of professional authenticity and care within my practice.

The Burden of Light

> *The first time that I entered the room, I noticed him. A tow-headed boy of stony-faced countenance who rarely smiled and seemed too burdened for words. I found out from the previous teacher that he was making little progress and often resisted being part of activities. In fact, the teacher was convinced that he made a habit of purposefully going to sleep so as to avoid doing work or interacting with others. I saw it too--over and over again during those initial weeks of observation. Sleeping...curled up in a ball in the Reading Corner...laying prostrate in the coat closet...totally still...totally quiet...peaceful-looking, I thought. I tried. I coerced. I entreated. I enlisted--but to no avail. I had really thought that I would be able to*

entice him to learn. I had really thought that I could make a difference. Apparently not. Nothing I did mattered. I was sinking into the abyss of hollow self-pity when, suddenly, a voice spoke. In hindsight, I should not have been surprised. I had longed for the sound of this voice, and I had often sought him out. But I was surprised nonetheless. "Ask him. ASK HIM." The voice was insistent and I, the listener, finally listened. And so I did just that: "Why do you sleep all the time?" The response came quickly and stridently: "Let me sleep. I'm SO tired. I wish everyone would leave me alone!" The tow-headed locks bounced violently in frustration. It was recess. Twenty minutes of potential silence. I sat down on the floor beside the quivering grade 2 body and whispered: "Sleep then." "Whaaat? You mean it?" The incredulity in the young voice cut through the hum of the overhead lights as a hot knife makes its way through fresh butter. "Yes. Sleep now," I heard my voice saying, "In fact, if you'd like, you can stay in every recess and sleep on the Reading Pillow." For the first time, I saw a faint gleam in the deep brown eyes of the boy I called Aaron. With a deep sigh and an "okay," he was asleep. The recesses of quiet stillness and the sleeping boy became a mainstay of my day. I felt like a Peace Protector, like a sort of Guardian of the Silence. One morning, there was a quiet knock at my classroom door. I glanced at the clock - 8:00 a.m. "Come in?!" In walked Aaron. "I think that if I could sleep in here now, I would be able to listen better in class." "You know where the pillow is." And so he slept...every morning for 30 minutes...quietly...still in his outside coat...

peacefully on the pillow. "Who knows what this is ?" I asked, holding up an axle from a toy truck. "That's the part that holds the wheels together!" a familiar, yet seldom-heard voice replied. Wonder of wonders...he had spoken up in class...for the first time in months...better yet, he was awake. "You're right. Do you know what it's called ?" "Yes. It's an axle." "Good job, Aaron." And so it continued. The sleeping...the questions...the quietness...the learning...until one day, the tow-headed boy did not rest on the pillow at recess. His coat was on and he was walking out the door, laughing with another student. Almost disappointed, I followed him. Yes. He was really going outside. What was I going to do with ***my*** *recess now? Sheepishly, I returned to my desk and sat down stunned... disbelieving...happy yet sad. Not long after, he approached me quietly, "Do you need help after school anytime?" "Sure, as long as your mommy sends me a note saying that it is okay. She needs to know where you are. There's always something to do." A nod, and that was all. Nothing more. The note arrived, and every day thereafter until I left, Aaron stayed in the room and quietly worked, cleaning up, organizing the next day's activities, and fixing the class bulletin boards.*

It was 5:30 p.m. and it was getting dusk outside as I gathered up my marking to go home. "Aaron. It's getting late. Won't your mommy be worried about you?" "No," came the quick reply, "couldn't you stay a little longer?" "I really can't. I'm sorry." "Okay." The coat went on, and he shuffled to the door.

"How about I drop you off at home ?" "No, I'll be fine." Beyond him, through the window, lightning flashed. "Aaron, it's going to storm outside. I really don't think that your mommy would like you walking home in this. I don't mind dropping you off." "Okay." And so it was--Aaron and I--driving together in my car up the dirt road to his house. I don't know what I had exactly pictured. I had met his mother twice and talked to her several times on the phone. She seemed nice enough, and she worried often about her little boy, the youngest of her three "kidlits" as she had put it. "Keep going...past the next road...there it is...on the left...this is it." The commentary sounded unreal to me as I looked at our destination. I had driven past this property a hundred times and thought it was abandoned. It should have been. The garage was half-collapsed; the driveway was choked with knee-high weeds; the two front windows of the little house were cracked in a star shape from top to bottom; the front steps were sloped and rotting; the tree swing was broken... BROKEN! Why I fixated on this I will never know, but I did not even notice him get out of the car. "Thanks." The simple word jolted me out of my horrified reverie. Oh no..."Aaron ! Wait !" It can't be...there was no light coming from the house...its dark silhouette was contrasted against the lightning-brightened sky. "No one's home. You can't go in there by yourself!" I'm sure that the tone of my voice betrayed me, for he turned to me, squared his little shoulders, and smiled faintly, "It's okay...I'll be fine...Bullet keeps me company." For the first time, I saw the bedraggled mutt near the house, wagging

his tail and pulling at his chain. In desperation, I tried to elongate the conversation: "I hope you remembered your key." "I don't need a key," came the matter-of-fact response. "My mom will be home by 6:30 and she'll let me in then." I could not believe my ears. "What about your older brother and sister? Surely they'll be home before that?!" It was only 5:40 p.m. "No. They are both working. Mom picks them up on her way home." "But you can't stay out here in the rain!" I protested. "Oh, I don't stay out here. I stay in there. I have a flashlight, and I always save some of my lunch for now in case I get hungry." In there? In there? In where? My eyes searched frantically for something more inviting than what I saw. There was nothing. Nothing except...oh no...not the root cellar. I could not have moved if I had wanted to. It was one of those moments when everything around me ground to a halt. Even the lightning seemed to cease for a moment. Aaron had already loosed the dog and lifted the latch of the sloping door. As he slowly disappeared downwards, our eyes locked. He mouthed, "I'll be alright." I tried to wave and smile but I'm still not sure if my hand or mouth ever moved. In my mind's eye, the bolt of lightning kept outlining a small face peering up from behind that broken, earthen door. I barely got home that night. I had trouble seeing the road. Whether it was because of the storm's heavy rain or the heavy storminess of my heart, I cannot tell.

The following appears in my journal from that night:

Someone remind me someday that short conversations full of honesty are so

much better than long ones full of nothingness. Someone remind me someday that life is not always easy. Someone remind me someday that Truth is simple and is owned by the children. Someone remind me someday that it is us, the caring adults, who have created the need for old root cellars. Someone remind me someday that it is far better to listen than to speak. Someone remind me someday of Aaron for I shall never be "alright" again.....

"**So the woodcarver resists people's efforts to name him from the outside in" (Palmer, 2004, p. 103).**

Looking back now, I believe that, metaphorically, I was the woodcarver. In the early stages of my career, I was doing constant battle, resisting those who were bent on molding me into their images. After years of being bombarded with these voices of impostership, I, too, became like them for a time--I, too, began trying to force my student-learners into a mold that comforted and empowered me.

"**With simplicity and clarity, he claims the right to name himself from the inside out" (Palmer, 2004, p. 103).**

Through the act of writing about these two particular students, I understand that Aaron and Helena have been the master woodcarvers of my professional personhood. In reconstructing my experience with them now, in the present, I have become reacquainted with the appearance of authenticity in my professional life. I can see that through reconsidering the lives of these two students, I have learned about myself. As they claimed their right to "name themselves" within my experience, I was forced not only to

bear witness to the cost of authentic care, but also to consider its true nature.

"**When we fail to take this first, critical step of fending off projections and reserving the right to name our own truth, we become lost in eternal smoke and mirrors and cannot even find the trail ahead of the path into our inner lives" (Palmer, 2004, p. 103).**

I again return to my underlying premise: This self-study is really nothing more than another attempt of mine at naming my own truth. My blindly feeble attempts at woodcarving, coupled with the masterful paring of my students--these collectively serve me now as beacons for my past and future. Its ever-growing light marks the point in time when I walked out of the smoke and mirrors of professional impostership and began seeking out the trail to my inner life as an authentic teacher. I am now carving out my own living curriculum of care. I am now THE woodcarver of my OWN existence. I begin now to name myself --from the inside out.

While the relatively new process of authentically naming myself unfolds, I have, conversely, been intrigued with the study of curriculum for most of my career. Engaging in this self-study writing, I recognize that this process of authentic self-discovery would be severely devalued for me if I did not also explore my views of curriculum. I feel that, being an educator, the understanding generated from critical conversations around the concept of curriculum is of tremendous importance, both to my students and to me--their lead-learner--as we interact together on a daily basis. The exploration of this working and learning relationship comprises my next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE CURRICULUM OF LIFE

We give ourselves up to where our experience leads us. We attend as closely and faithfully as we currently can to our immediate experience....It is...the authentic investigation of experience, in which our theoretical expositions are dialectically linked with that experience....We will make important discoveries as well, if we are brave....The possible educative functions of curriculum... are inseparable from the processes of myth-making and story-telling.

(Pinar, 1994, pp. 123, 209)

To agree with Pinar, I believe that one must justifiably be able to make the phenomenological connection between curriculum and storying. On the surface, I concur with this association; however, I believe that the conceptualization of this relationship must be extended to a deeper level of understanding. Not only do I consider story-telling and myth-making as central to the educative functions of curriculum, but I would also maintain that curriculum devoid of such events is not really curriculum at all. It seems to me that any curriculum lacking these fundamentally interactive traits would be more in line with what I would define as a "curriculum of impostership"--one that has more to do with maintaining the comfort levels of system leaders and less to do with the authentic engagement of learners within the system. Through the dialectic process of writing this research paper, I have come to the unswerving conclusion that curriculum cannot be authentic without learners' interaction and integration of their own personal literacy in the form of stories within its framework.

My view of curriculum has undergone much change since my foray into the teaching profession some 16 years ago. Like many of my peers, I entered upon the scene

with what I understood to be an adequate curricular arsenal of strategies, tools, and tricks of the trade. My journey from such blissful ignorance to my present professional state has been one to which aneurysms are akin. I now believe that curriculum is the reflection of deliberately communicative interactions within a community of learners. These interactions are a type of symbiotic subject matter. As these stories and experiences, shared between learners, are accepted and validated, they collectively act as the vehicle for both the interaction itself and for the future continuation of this type of interaction. Within this context, it is not the outside text that matters, but rather it is the dialogic interconnectedness amongst and between learners that facilitates their learning. Curriculum is not static. It is not quantifiable. It does not originate from books, nor can it be replicated exactly and scientifically. This being said, I have come to the conclusion that it is not enough to ask: "What is curriculum?" Rather, I believe that one needs to consider the deeper question, "What does *successful* curriculum look like?"

...Of Successful Curriculum

Curriculum is only truly successful when all learners' beliefs, values, needs, and desires constitute the parameters of the learning milieu. (Pugh, 2000, p. 1)

For years, I had held to the idea that my classroom routines and activities must meet the needs and desires of each unique group of learners; however, at the same time, I also felt that there always seemed to be an inherent lack that I was never able to fully qualify. In 2000, during a course called *Curricular Strategies* with Dr. Carmen Shields, I was reintroduced to the curriculum theorizing work of J.J. Schwab through some

discussions that we were having on the characteristics of school curriculum. I had encountered his writings in a prior instance, but I had not really stopped at that time to examine his claims in any detail. During this course, I took sufficient time to deeply consider the implications of Schwab's theorizing. As I shared my developing understanding with my colleagues, I realized that there was a huge gap in my view of curriculum as it played out within my classroom. I came to the conclusion that truly successful curriculum could be present only within the *milieu*--a zone produced by deliberate and proactive planning around the collectively defined, interactive context of a specific learning group. Of particular interest to me at the time was the realization that of equal importance to the parametric quotient of the *milieu* were **my** beliefs, values, needs, and desires as "teacher." Although relatively simplistic by definition, the uncovering of this truth "shook" my world to a large degree.

Having always had a fairly solid understanding of my power as "teacher" and an equally unwavering view of the potential of the collaborative learning process within the classroom, it came as quite a personal revelation to finally understand that I had never fully owned this concept: that my "learning self" also had a stake in the process of corporate learning. I had not ever given much thought to whether or not **my** learning self was being satiated and stimulated along the way, nor had I allowed this part of me to be at the forefront of my formalized curricular planning. Out of this startling personal revelation came the need to visualize my new understanding as it related to both me and to the learners around me. Figure 1 was the product of this very intense learning.

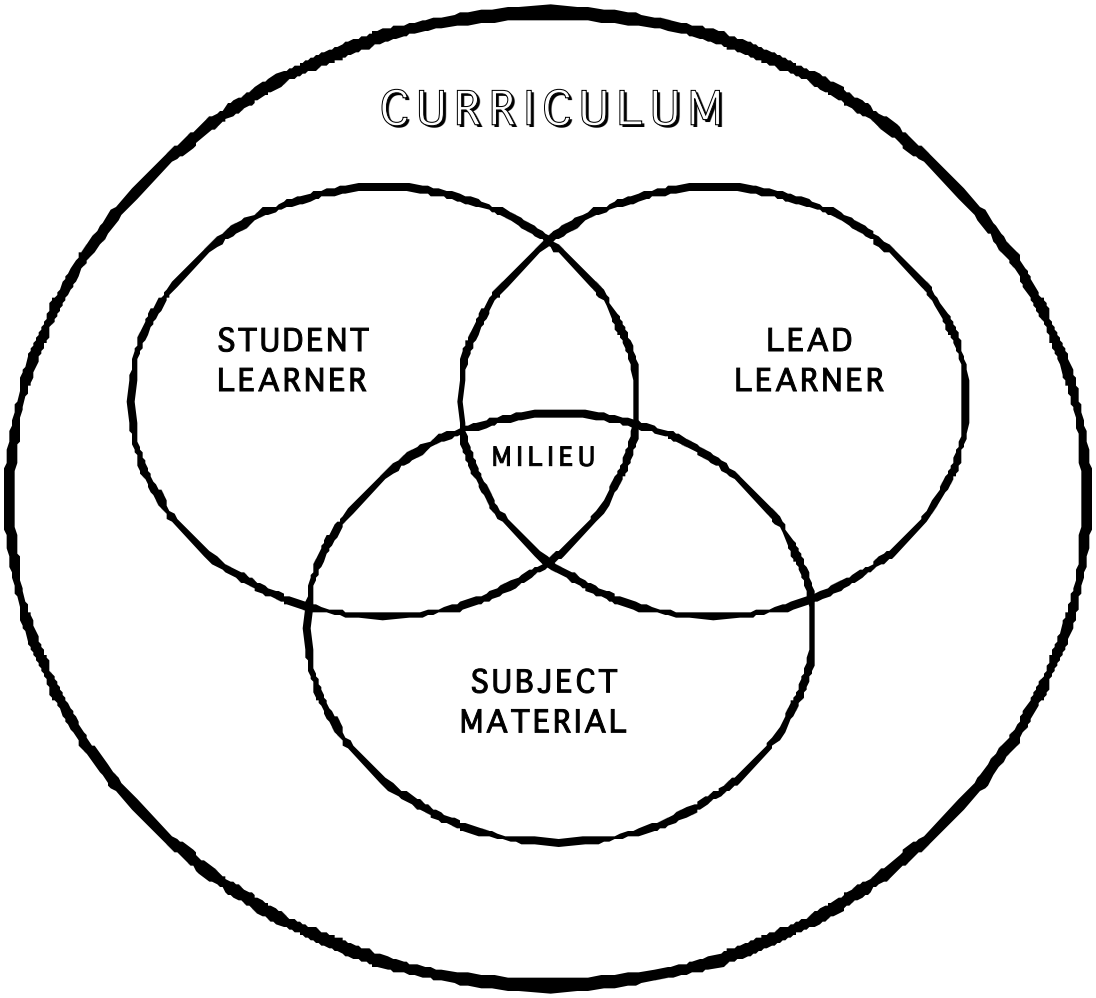

Figure 1. Curriculum circle.

The outer wall represents the sphere of protective influence within which learners function together. For the sake of clarity, I need to here highlight the fact that, during this course in 2000, I consciously stopped referring to myself as "teacher" and instead began using the term "lead-learner." Likewise, my use of "student" took on a newly minted form, "student-learner." Therefore, within this diagram, the recognition of contributors to the process parallels my newly found perception: student-learner, lead-learner, and subject material. As stated previously, the subject material does not necessarily refer only to certain academic pen-and-paper pursuits, but rather also to the learner-generated subject matter--the results of interactive learning. At the centre of the venn diagram is the *milieu*. At the time, I saw this area--the place of overlap amongst all contributors--as being the forum for meaningful curriculum. I still agree with this stance; however, as I alluded to previously, I have been able to expand upon my initial theorizing. I now view the existence of the *milieu* as fundamental to authentic curriculum. This is the ONLY area of my *Curriculum Circle* within which I believe that authentic, corporate learning occurs. Within the *milieu*, authentic, meaningful learning is developed through interactive, dialogic communication, story-telling, and story-making as it occurs between and amongst its learners.

Care is central to successful curriculum: it is non-negotiable and self-delineating.

(Pugh, 2000, p.1)

This notion has been a strongly held tenet of mine in terms of curriculum for the past number of years. I first came to this conclusion at the end of this course of 2000,

aptly named *Curricular Strategies*. However, throughout the process of this research paper, this stance has been repeatedly reaffirmed. For me, the practice of care within curriculum **is indeed** nonnegotiable and self-delineating. I am now fully convinced that my "self that teaches," vis-à-vis Palmer (1998), has to be more of a reckoning force within my planning and meting out of curricular pedagogy. For too much of my career I have allowed the imposter-like qualities of "school" to interfere with my efforts to care appropriately for my student-learners. Perhaps it also goes without saying that my accompanying levels of professional self-care have been mostly non-existent as well. As Noddings (1984) says, "We cannot talk a care ethic - we can only live it" (p. 178).

Thus, in its most simplistic form, I believe that successful curriculum is encapsulated in the authentic, dialectic interchange between learners. Within this exchange, the lead-learner must comport him/herself in a caring way such that his/her personal ways of knowing and the modes of living are cohesive and consistently coexistent. I feel sure, that for myself, it is only in this fashion that curriculum can then successfully meet the needs and desires of all learners. In short, the learning can then become authentic.

...Of Authentic Curriculum

What then are the earmarks of authentic curriculum? I maintain that the answer lies within the interaction of its learners--within the shared subject matter of their communication--within the *milieu*. During a debriefing conversation with Dr. Shields in

August of 2000, I came to the conclusion that I needed to further qualify my practical understanding of curriculum. At the time, I had already tentatively created my *Curriculum Circle,* and I was seeking yet another way to view my interaction with student-learners. It occurred to me to use a mnemonic device--a strategy that I had been modelling with my grade 5 class at the time. I gathered my journal notes, and I began writing down all of the important features of curriculum. As I did this, I began matching each feature with one of the letters used in the spelling of the word "CURRICULUM." The result was a list of 10 characteristics that I felt were essential to a good practical understanding of curriculum and authentic learning. Since then, I have planned learning events from the standpoint that they must fulfil every one of the 10 criteria or be rejected. Over time, I have thought of this framework, (Figure 2), as *My Authenticity Meter*.

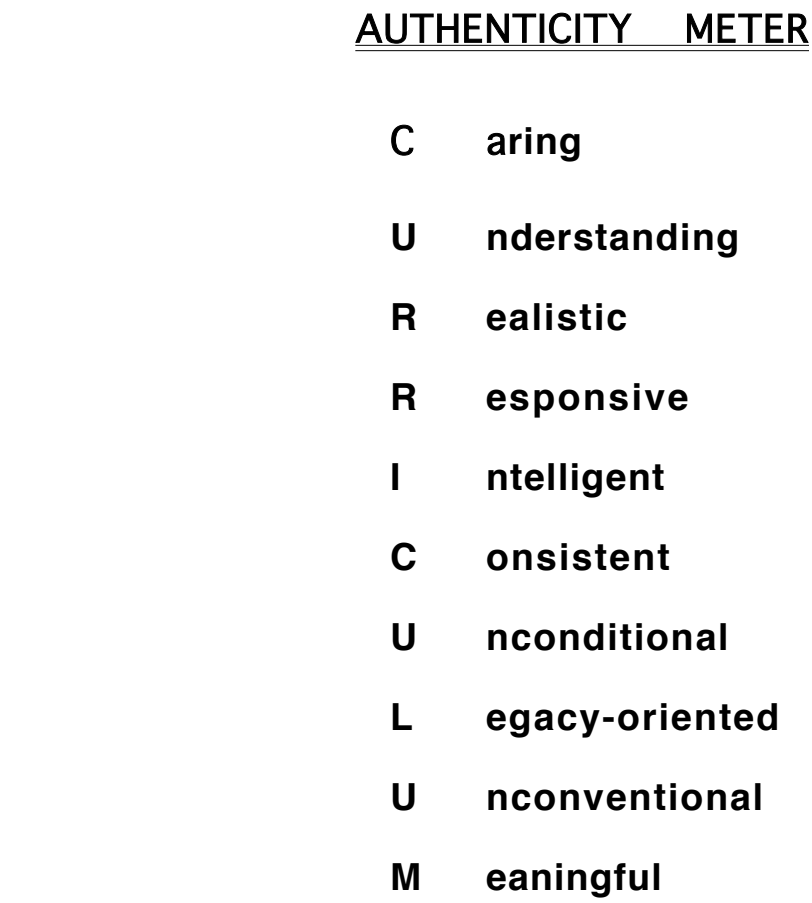

Figure 2. Authenticity meter.

As my own learning has unfolded throughout this research paper, I have realized anew that these features indeed identify what I believe to be the summative earmarks of authentic curriculum. What follows are my galvanized thoughts on each of these features. I hope they serve to usher the reader into my mindset of curriculum, as put against the backdrop of my experiences, the ideas of educational sages, and my own theoretical positioning.

Having been the beneficiary of my grandmother's consistent care, I learned that an authentic curriculum must first be **caring** of its learners, regardless of age and capability. I believe that my learners will never care how much I know until they know how much I care. I cannot allow my success as an educator to be solely defined by the somewhat stagnant opinions of my administrative managers or by the sometimes whimsical musings of the current consultant gurus. At the end of the day, I am truly successful only to the degree that my students feel and understand my authentic care for them. I must first be a giver of care. Without care, I can never hope to be given the key to my learners' hearts, from which springs the privilege of influence and the real essence of curriculum. "Clearly, in professions where encounter is frequent...I am first and foremost one-caring and, second, enactor of specialized functions. As teacher, I am, first, one-caring" (Noddings, 1984, p. 176).

I believe that another important ingredient of an authentic curriculum is that of **understanding**. I do not think that "caring" equals "warm fuzzies." I maintain that there must be a grounding of curricular care within an intuitive, informed, and reciprocated

understanding of all learners' needs and desires. In my mind, an authentic and understanding approach to curriculum also means that a real sense of the many situational factors which influence learners outside of the formalized learning event be embraced by the lead-learner. In fact, without this understanding, I think that the efforts to develop authentic curriculum are moot. Here, I draw upon my childhood experience in my father's shop that I shared in an earlier chapter. Even though I had seen engines taken apart many times prior to this experience, I was not able to do it "properly" because I had no understanding of the desired end result. I did not have this understanding because my father had not taken the time to create a reciprocal understanding with me in terms of our individual needs and desires. He had not built a context for my understanding. I am sure that the outcome would have been much different if he had realized that more than wanting to successfully dismantle an engine, I, as his son, was looking to bask in the accepting warmth of his affection.

Another characteristic of my authentic curriculum is that of being seen as **realistic** in the eyes of learners. As is documented in this research paper, I have come to fully appreciate both the dangers and the benefits inherent in the hinterland that exists between learners' perceptions of what "learning" should be and my perception of what "learning" is. I constantly return to that cold October night long ago when I was unceremoniously dumped on my assumptions by concerned parents. There, I had failed to appreciate the dichotomy between the reality of the institution called "school" as defined by greater society and its curricular reality as daily lived by its learners. In order for any learning to

have long-lasting meaning, I now argue that an event itself must be viewed as realistic by learners within the *milieu*. "Teaching [and learning] are both public and private activities. [They] call on both narrative and analytic ways of knowing. ...The act of teaching [and learning] calls us to live in the worlds of actuality and of possibility and vision" (Witherell & Noddings, 1991, p. 9).

Not only is authentic curriculum realistic, but I see it as being **responsive**. Realism without response is, to me, like theory devoid of practice--in my mind, it doesn't really matter one iota. Thinking back to an earlier story called, *Hero of the Rock*, I could have sat on the story-telling rock and watched the dump truck race down the dirt road toward Paul, simply hoping that it would miss him. But, the reality of the situation evoked a series of responses from me. First, I called for help. Then, changing my approach, I yelled at Paul to go back. When that did not work, I ran. In the same way that I responded to Paul's real need that day long ago, I believe that a caring, responsive curricular approach, deeply rooted in both the perceived and real needs, wants, and aspirations of learners, will garner highly interactive subject matter. As lead-learner within the *milieu*, I feel I am obligated to be involved in the community of learning to the point where I am constantly reworking my curricular approach as a response to the shared culture of learning. If I do this consistently over time, I believe that the resultant subject matter will become the vehicle for increasing learning potential through the ongoing personal, dialectic responses of the learners to one another. "At the deepest reaches, knowing requires us to imagine the inner standpoint of the subject (Palmer, 1998,

p. 105).

I feel that authentic curriculum must be **intelligent** in practice and intelligence-oriented in theory. This is one characteristic which I have embraced anew during the writing of this self-study paper. I believe that this sort of curricular approach is centered upon and delineated by the collective intelligence of all learners. Reflecting back, I see that I experienced this firsthand from my student-learners when we were in the Circle of Fire that day, discussing ways we could care for one of our community: Helena. They showed me that, together, we could make a bigger difference in her life than we could have individually. Their emotionally intelligent ways of being were astounding to me. This communal aspect has its origins within the self-intelligence of the lead-learners--in this case, my students--who led that day as they decided how to care for a fellow student. Palmer (2000) identifies lead-learners as ones who "have penetrated their own inner darkness and arrived at a place where we are at one with one another; people who can lead...to a place of 'hidden wholeness' because they have been there and know the way" (pp. 80-81).

I also assert that authentic curriculum must be **consistent** as well. In my opinion, it is of no earthly good to have the most spectacular of programs and lack the consistency of personal character to see them through to conclusion. I believe that a vigorously authentic curriculum is denoted by consistent expectations in all learning disciplines. These expectations are then consolidated, adjusted, and perpetuated by the constant dialogic feedback of learners throughout the activities. It has been my experience that

most genuine learners innately recognize consistently authentic curriculum and, in turn, respond to it in like manner. This responsive interaction, namely the subject matter of the *milieu*, is heightened by curricular consistency, and this curricular consistency is, in turn, reciprocally strengthened by the parties involved in the interaction. "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher" (Palmer, 1998, p. 10).

For me, authentic curriculum is also **unconditional** in nature. I can best describe this as a corollary to the spiritual notion of grace. There are no conceptual hoops through which learners must leap to gain credibility or significance. I believe that there should be no strings attached to the outpouring of support given to learners. There should be no behaviourally-based or economically-driven factors which include or exclude the recipients from this kind of enabling acceptance. For me, there is an unconditional acceptance of the learner as he/she is in the present. Remembering my story of the ash tree, I see that my grandmother, even though I had unwittingly destroyed that which she loved and she was very upset, accepted me unconditionally. She recognized my great effort as valuable in and of itself, although, in reality, my actions resulted in a very negative outcome for her. In fact, even after I presented her with the bedraggled tree, she still wanted to spend time with me: *"Don't cry. It was only a tree. You and I have had a busy day--let's go inside now. We'll read a story before supper."*

> The teacher receives and accepts the student's feelings toward subject matter; [he] looks at it and listens to it through the student's eyes. As this happens, [the

> teacher] accepts [the student's] motives and learning - this is the goal of teaching - this is "inclusion". This is vital to...[learning]. This is the special gift of teaching - receive students and look at his/her learning with him/her. (Noddings, 1984, p. 176)

Functionally speaking, I believe that authentic curriculum is also **legacy-oriented**. I have a plaque on the wall next to my desk with the inscription: *"To teach is to touch a life forever."* While I have witnessed colleagues scoff and roll their eyes at this seemingly trite aphorism, it really reflects one of the key characteristics of authentic curriculum in my mind: Authentic curriculum is **never** forgotten by its learners. I am constantly humbled by the fact that the nearly 2000 student-learners, with whom I have worked over the years carry me, "Mr. Pugh," with them, for better or for worse. If I wish to be the effective lead-learner within my authentic curriculum, I know I must strive to make my student-learners' experiences "for better" each and every time I interact with them. I strongly believe that childrens' memories are not trite and trivial; they are the fuel and fodder of future success. These memories can inspire or destroy, imprison or liberate--all within a blink of the mind's eye. I, myself, am living proof of this stance. "Teachers possess the power to create conditions that can help students learn a great deal - or keep them from learning much at all. Teaching is the intentional act of creating those conditions" (Palmer, 1998, p. 6).

If my aim is to keep my curriculum authentic, then I believe it needs to be more or less **unconventional** in practice. I should not hesitate to push open the neatly folded

envelope of "school." I need to be inspiring, intuitive, extraordinary, and exceptional as a lead-learner. Only then will my curriculum be similar. If I am unconventional in practice, I believe that I will better engage the minds of all learners, feeding their imaginations to overflowing so that all of us are intrigued and challenged. "Curriculum is not comprised of subjects, but of Subjects, of subjectivity. The running of the course is the building of the self, the lived experience of subjectivity" (Pinar, 1994, p. 220).

Meaningful is my final characteristic of authentic curriculum. In times of professional reflection, I have not hesitated to maintain that authentically effective curriculum creates meaning and promotes personal meaning-making on the parts of the learners involved. I further believe that, in order for curriculum to be meaningful, it must first be authentic. I know this to be true. Looking back once more on my interaction with Tammy, had it not been authentically meaningful, I would not have been so undone over the situation. If there had been no personal meaning-making throughout our interactions, then I feel sure that her refusal to attend my class would not have bothered me nearly as much. Conversely, the fact that my learning was authentically meaningful created a huge, hegemonic dilemma for me when I was originally dealing with my dissenting colleague. It was my exuberant relaying of my authentic relationship with this student-learner that created the untenable situation within which I found myself later on. I believe that authenticity has but one origin: the souls of learners. In other words, as lead-learner, I must own the curriculum and make personally authentic meaning from my interactions within the *milieu*; otherwise, it will be of no lasting value to me or to the student-learners

around me. If it is of no value, it has had no meaning. If it has had no meaning, then it is of no worth. If it is of no worth, then it is not authentic curriculum, for I believe that authentic curriculum can change lives.

...Of Curriculum and Learners-Past

As I have been repeatedly confronted with both the realities of authenticity and the rigours of care within my own practice, I have once again become acutely aware of the insidious nature of impostership. It has, despite my best intentions and greatest of efforts, infected all areas of my own learning as both an individual and as a professional educator. In fact, I have had to revisit and modify both my understandings of and my philosophical positions on curriculum, learners, and personal literacy numerous times in order to maintain some sense of personal equilibrium throughout the process of this writing.

At the beginning of my Master of Education program, in one of my earliest major papers, I presented my own definition of curriculum: *"Curriculum, in its most basic form, is simply...an ordered schematic within which the educational process can occur"* (Pugh, 1997, p. 3). At that time, I continued with the following:

> *Taking into account more erudite thinking on the subject, I acknowledge the value of what Posner (1995) calls "the five concurrent curricula: ...the official, the operational, the hidden, the null, and the extra curriculum" (p. 11). While all of the above are integral for a healthy understanding of curriculum and its systemic*

functions, I deem that the ***null and the hidden curricula*** *must be seen as fundamentally vital to this discussion. (p. 3)*

While I now shudder at the audacious simplicity of my then-best thoughts on "curriculum," some of what I said in regard to Posner's null and hidden curricula is still valid to a point. At that time, I placed a high degree of importance upon the two curricula. I maintained that the elements found within a school environment which are not consciously taught are still taught after a fashion. I went on to state, *"that which is ignored is consequentially validated. I would contend that these two curricula have the most profound impact on students"* (Pugh, pp. 3-4). With this statement, I still concur. While recently looking back over this paper and its associated class notes, I came to the startling conclusion that I, as lead-learner within the classroom setting, have always been in a position of influence in regard to the null and hidden curricula. Previously, I had always considered that these were nothing more than the unwieldy consequences of a school system teetering upon the brink of inbred stagnation and nepotism.

As I now reconsider my philosophical positioning on Posner's (1995) null and hidden curriculum, I realize that I was precariously close to the precipice of "values and beliefs." As alluded to earlier in this research, my teaching career began amidst much theoretical flux. One of the mantras of teacher-educators at the time was to ensure that new teachers avoided an advocation of a value-laden education at all costs. Throughout my career, I have always been uncomfortable with this admonition. Time and time again, when the issue of values and beliefs have come up in collegial conversations, I would

always find myself having little to say. If I retrace dialectically, I can now see the hegemonic effect of this professional reticence. If I had been firm in my resolve about the role of values within learning, the outcomes of many of my experiences could have been very different. I believe now that I would have better stood my ground when confronted by my pop-machine-hating colleague. Perhaps, I would not have walked away, defeated, and bullied into silence. When I stood in front of those adversarial parents on that fateful October night long ago, I might have been better able to respond to their accusations and demands. Adhering to the centrality of values and beliefs within learning would surely have also better protected me during the professional drive-by hit as dealt by my short-sighted administrator of the time. And, finally, I feel certain that a firm understanding of this precept would have allowed me to better advocate for my innocent Tammy when both she and I became the unwitting victims of another teacher's self-righteous fury and hollow indignation.

On the one hand, as I look back, this personal dearth angers me. On the other, I counsel myself to give to my professionalism the same respect and time-for-growth that I offer regularly to my student-learners. I now realize the reasons for my discomfort with the null and hidden curricula. Having been exposed to a negating philosophical position on value-laden education early in my career, I had never openly espoused an embedded, authentic way of learning for fear of upsetting "those who knew more than me." I believe I was what Belenky, Clinchy, Blythe, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) identify as "a receiver of knowledge":

> Those who think that they *receive* all knowledge are more apt to think of authorities...as sources of truth. They equate receiving, retaining, and returning the words of authorities with learning - at least with the kind of learning they associate with school. (p. 39)

Trying to be a "good teacher," then, entailed doing what I was told, even when it went against my internal judgment and character. "Those who [have] received knowledge listen carefully and try hard to live up to the images that others have held up to them. They are especially at the mercy of authorities' judgments" (Belenky et al., p. 49). Interestingly enough, I believe that my authentic self slowly and continuously leaked out through the cracks in and around the very walls erected by my own professional impostership. I can now state with some assurance that I view my "teaching" to be a wholly personal interaction which flows out of my own life experience and individual personality. It is, in reality, my public learning.

In the summer of 1997, when I first encountered the work of Posner, I found a passage within his book which resonated in me so loudly that I read it repeatedly. I remember feeling at the time both apprehension and a deep sense of relief when I read it--although then, I had no idea why: "In reality, no curriculum...can be completely technical, completely value-free, since it inevitably concerns an intervention in people's lives" (Posner 1995, p. 15). Some 9 years later, I now understand why I was so drawn to his words.

In the major paper for my first Master's level course, I was already tentatively exploring the ideas of impostership and authenticity in regard to learners. Much to my present astonishment as I look back, I see that I had written:

> *As a teacher, I am very uncomfortable addressing or discussing something within the classroom if I have not expended sufficient time in study prior to its presentation. Similarly, when contemplating the definition and role of today's learner, it would be dubious to assume that I could effectively understand and communicate how to learn if I do not first have a clear conviction of myself as being a learner. One could argue that all teachers should be automatically labelled as such, based on their habitual contact with and involvement in a learning environment. I contest this idea due to my belief that such postulation is solely dependent upon a somewhat fraudulent working definition of "learner." (Pugh, 1997, p. 10)*

I then proceeded to outline my personal definition of a learner as *"an individual who deliberately seeks out, interprets, and accommodates new knowledge on a continual basis, such that the process itself further defines one's personhood and inspires the person to more profound levels of self-reflection"* (p. 10). I continued:

> *The validation of this definition has some sobering implications when considering the extent to which all teachers are engaged in authentic learning. I would identify the key word of the above definition to be that of* ***deliberately****. If this is the case, it is*

logical to assume that those professionals who do not purposefully accommodate new knowledge on an ongoing basis could be labelled as nonlearners. This designation automatically assigns such a teacher to a back-bench position in respect to the whole exchange about educational reform. In essence, the resulting professional depreciation reinforces the already-noted credibility crisis within the eye of the public. In expounding upon all of the above, I am cognizant...that this definitive process would most certainly do detriment to some colleague's self-esteem and self-worth. The very presence of this admonition leads me to reflect upon the role of one's acknowledgement and understanding of personal failure within the learning process. I warrant that such legitimate personal reflection is often more beneficial to a learner than it is deleterious. (pp. 10, 11)

To say now that I am astounded at my own historical perspicacity is an understatement. These foundational statements speak volumes into the realities of this self-study in regard to the beginnings of my personal battle for professional authenticity. Perhaps it was the verbalization of this very theoretical framing then that has allowed me the mental flexibility to reposition myself through the many negating impostership experiences outlined in this research paper as they unfolded throughout my career. Looking back, I see that I was even then, in essence, moving away from an external understanding of power toward one of internal authority and authenticity. Belenky et al. (1997) describe this movement of personhood as "subjectivism":

A position from which [people] redefine the nature of authority....The orientation

to authority shifts from external to internal. Along with the discovery of personal authority arises a sense of voice - in its earliest form, a "still small voice." (p. 68)

Seeing that I concur with Belenky et al. (1997), it would be logical for me to conclude that my VOICE OF AUTHENTIC SELF was rebirthed within my professionalism at this rather inauspicious, babbling juncture of the practical and the personal within that course paper of so long ago. Unfortunately, this being true, it has taken all of the intervening years for me to learn how to listen to my authentic self to any large degree. Interestingly enough, I ended that first paper with the following statement:

> *While acknowledging the wide gamut of such theoretical dogma, I hereby reemphasize one of my original tenets, that being that in order for effective instruction to take place on an ongoing basis, I believe that my students must be convinced of my authentic interest in them as individuals.* (Pugh, 1997, p. 11)

And in so doing, I see that I returned full-circle to the aspect of authentic professionalism which still today consumes my thoughts and dictates my purposes: that of authentic care.

...Of Curriculum and Learners-Present

My present challenge is to now propose a mechanism for marrying together these ideas of highly effective curriculum, personal learning, and authentic care. In a way, this concept seems nothing more than another kind of literacy--personal and persuasive in nature. Its framework, like this research paper, is dialectic in nature and communicative in practice. My membership within my board's action research group of 2005 granted me the forum in which I could finally verbalize this concept that has been echoing in the halls

of my mind for all of these years:

> *COMMUNICATION LITERACY is the concept that true personal literacy lies in the ability to accommodate and interpret new information within an ever-changing, intentional framework of literate purpose and pursuit. It is not just pen- and paper-based, nor is it restricted to only mathematical, reading, and writing skills. It has everything to do with the ACT of communicating one's accumulated knowledge and understanding to others. This process finds its parameters within the practice of personal and corporate dialogue. This, in turn, gives rise to the making of meaning for all participants. As learners make meaning of this interaction, new methods of personal adaptation and communication are birthed. (Pugh, 2005, p. 2)*

I was also able to reposition my personal definition of a learner as *"anyone, student-learner or lead-learner, who makes a conscious effort to live in a communicative relationship with one another"* (Pugh, p. 2).

Truthfully, I believe that I have been assigning increasing personal value to these constructs in my practice since my encounter with Helena. It was there that I rediscovered anew the value of story-telling--those told to me by my student-learners and those which I shared with them. It was there that I once again began to learn again within the confines of balanced, personal accommodation. I now see that I must continually recognize the fundamental need to *participate* in learning events rather than just *observe* or *create* them for a second or third party. In doing so, I will successfully avoid the

entrapments of impostership. I will be able to foster and maintain deep care for my student-learners through authentic curriculum--centered on ALL of us as a learning community. As I authentically care for these student-learners, I will in turn better care for myself as lead-learner. As I provide care for my own learning, I will empower my personal authenticity as a professional. This empowerment will inform my position as lead-learner so that I can commute authenticity to my student-learners. In so doing, I hope to see myself in the transaction--my authentic self. This hitherto elusive self that has become better known to me throughout this writing process cannot go into hiding again, for far too much has been discovered and uncovered. I wish it to continue. I wish to see clearly my reflection in the eyes of those around me. I wish to hear clearly my real voice reflected in the dialogue around me. I wish to make a difference--an authentic difference in the lives of those around me. I wish to learn. I want to care.

> We need to look with unclouded eyes on what we are doing. The purpose of dialogue [and learning] is to come into contact with ideas and to understand, to meet the other and to care. ... We intervene perceptively and creatively, attributing the best possible motive, and offering our help and our example of caring. (Noddings, 1984, pp. 186, 193)

CHAPTER SIX: RENAISSANCE...THE STATE OF BEING ENLIGHTENED

A leader is someone with the power to project either shadow or light onto some part of the world and onto the lives of the people who dwell there. A leader shapes the ethos in which others must live, an ethos as light-filled as heaven or as shadowy as hell. A *good* leader is intensely aware of the interplay of inner shadow and light, lest the act of leadership do more harm than good. The power for authentic leadership, Havel tells us, is found not in external arrangements but in the human heart. Authentic leaders...aim at liberating the heart, their own and others', so that its power can liberate the world.

(Palmer, 2000, pp. 76, 78)

Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together. ...knowing my students and my subject depends heavily on self-knowledge.

(Palmer, 1998, p. 2)

Learning to Lead and Leading to Learn

And so, throughout the course of this self-study research paper, two phenomena, leadership and teaching, once disparate in my mind, have now become almost synonymous with one another. I can sum them up, simply and without hesitation, in one term: "lead-learner." For years, I have played with this idea, almost irreverently at times, testing its mettle, trying its conviction, and reflecting its truth back onto myself. Time and time again, I have been unable to see a clear reflection of myself in this concept. I have always thought that this professional "fuzziness" was due to the impact of the overwhelming shadows around me. These shadows seemed to instantly occlude any benefit of the light that I always saw in the distance--the light after which I constantly

chased or tried to cajole into coming closer. I now understand that the shadows were indeed occluding the light--but their source was not where I thought it to be. The shadows were emanating from ME--from every part of me; therein lies the reason for their overwhelming effect. Completing this research paper has lent me the courage needed to walk in the shadows that make their home amidst my experience--shadows of my fraudulent self--shadows of my impostership. Here, I return to the concept of impostership, as broached in Chapter One of this journey:

> Teachers often feel like imposters. They feel that they don't really deserve to be taken seriously as competent professionals because they're aware that they don't really know what they are doing. All they're certain of is that unless they're very careful, they will be found out to be teaching under false pretences. (Brookfield, 1995, p. 229)

Through the uncovering of personal truth within my own stories, I have discovered what Palmer (1998) calls "a secret hidden in plain sight" (p. 3): my authentic self. He maintains that such self-knowledge is fundamental to good teaching (p. 3). I would agree, adding only that this understanding of self is also central to the entire learning process of all individuals. That being said, I believe that it behooves me, as a lead-learner, to ensure that this process of self-disclosure is integral to all of my future curriculum--to all of my future interactions with student-learners.

As is the result of many a journey into unknown territory, one comes out at the other end with a much different treasure than originally pictured. My treasure? I now

simply understand the reasons for the existence of my shadows and, ultimately, my impostership:

> We feel fraudulent, even invisible, because we are not in the world as who we really are. ... Our inauthenticity and projections [of who we think we are] make real relationships impossible, leading to loneliness. ...We sense that something is missing in our lives and search the world for it, not understanding that what is missing is us. (Palmer, 2004, p. 16)

I did not see that **I** was what was missing. I had listened to everyone and everything around me except for myself--my own voice was unrecognizable to me. My self-deceit was not overtly intentional but was, nonetheless, pervasive and persuasive. It is no longer so.

As I look back over my learning in this research paper, I am both astonished and humbled. I am astonished at my inability to previously see that which has always been in my mind's eye--the door to my future; astonished that it took me so long to put the key of self into the lock in the door that opens to the path of authenticity and purpose. I am equally astonished at the plethora of personal truth which I now see lying barren and naked in front of me. I am humbled to think that I ignored my earliest and most pure learning, failing to recognize authentic care at its finest. I now realize that I--the "unconscious expert"; the "unconscious practitioner"; the "conscious practitioner"; and the "conscientious care-giver"--was nothing more than a bad actor in a very badly contrived play of reality. I am humbled as I state here that all of these personal labels,

once so central to my understanding of self, are really nothing more than the route-markers along my journey through my own impostership. Last, I am humbled that it took the innocent authenticity of my student-learners to finally awaken me and break open my eyes to the reality of who I am and the person whom I desire to be. Nonetheless, astonished and humbled, I am extremely thankful, for "the more familiar we are with our inner terrain, the more sure-footed our teaching - and living becomes" (Palmer, 1998, p.5).

My Undivided Self

> In the undivided self, every major thread of one's life experience is honoured, creating a weave of such coherence and strength that it can hold students and subjects as well. Such a self, inwardly integrated, is able to make the outward connections on which good teaching depends. (Palmer, 1998, p. 15)

Above all else, I desire this: to be undivided once again. This self-study has provided the terrain for me as I have retraced the intricate weaving of these many threads that make up my life's tapestry.

> *I failed to see it at first. In fact, when I first entered the room, having just blindly put the key into the lock, I saw nothing. My eyes had to adjust to the deep shadows of my surroundings. In the far corner, I saw it--a tapestry--half-finished--hastily thrown in a heap as if the weaver had been called away to something far more important. As I pick it up and gently run my hand over the threads, now creased*

with the passage of years, I see a glimmer from within. Amongst its colourful, now somewhat-frayed members, winking as it is allowed through the web of life, appears the faint twinkling of a light. My heart quickens, for I believe that I recognize this light--I think that I used to know it well. In fact, on more than one occasion, I remember taking for granted its inviting warmth and protective glow. As I gingerly part the well-worn threads, I am able to draw closer to it. In doing so, I realize that it is not a light at all. Disappointed, I begin to cry. My tears fall upon the tapestry, washing off its dust and penetrating the shadowy layers of cord upon cord. My emotional reverie over with, I look closely once again and then I see it--caught in the deepest reaches of the tapestry--amidst its entangled coils. I DO see something glimmering. Mustering all of my inner fortitude, I gently and patiently draw closer to its outline in the shadows. Half-covered in the dust of many years is an embossed, silver star--left there by the pudgy fingers of a little blond boy of long ago. Having finally found that for which I had searched so long, I cautiously coax it out. My joy turns to instant sorrow as I realize that it is gray and lifeless--its once-captivating embellishment now gone. I slump against the wall, clutching the tapestry to my chest, wholly undone. It is then that two old friends appear together on my mind's stage. They have not appeared there for some time. As I wrestle my gaze away from the neglected tapestry, I realize that once again he has fixed his tear-filled, bright-blue eyes upon mine: "Be good, Tim; be good." No sooner has he spoken than his

ever-present companion, the one with the trembling hands and faintly-painted lips, smiles slowly and gently admonishes: "Don't cry. It was only a tree. Just remember that all things have value--your job is to recognize it." With that, they are gone. Gathering myself, I once again turn my gaze to the tapestry, but this time, with new eyes. Yes, I do see a glimmer of light--indeed, a reflection. But the little star, once the central focus of my frantic search, is now simply a token of my new understanding. For I have learned that silver stars do not have a light of their own--they simply reflect a greater light. In this case, my own.

And so, upon this analogy of darkness and light, I arrest myself one more time to examine the roles of impostership and authenticity within my practice. In so doing, I am obliged to once again examine myself within this self-study research. Have I been changed? Yes. Definitely. I am still "he." I am still the "narrator" with the embedded story--my own story. However, I now realize that I am more than just the narrator of my story. I am actually now willing to be named as the author of this story. As is the practice of all effective authors, I hold myself in line with my story--blemishes and all. Here, I take responsibility for my own learning. This personal accountability is the result of a long and arduous journey to my here and now. I acknowledge the tremendous impact of my lead-learners upon my practice and personhood. It is through them--their gentle counsel, their perceptive leadership, and their skilful carving--that I have been liberated from impostership and led once again into the path of authenticity. They have bestowed upon me such richness, the depths of which I am unable to properly express save for the

stories that I share. In return for their faithful goodness toward me, I will endeavour to honour them with authentic, caring, personally literate learning during the remainder of my life's story.

> Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves. ...Live the questions right now. Perhaps, you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. Rainer Maria Rilke (in Palmer, 2004, p. 129)

Epilogue

There are those of us who walk tenderly through life as if to not disturb those already in transit. As we journey, we cannot but be changed as we allow both the divine and the temporal to both nourish and temper us, creating in us the reality of life and breath and all that is.

(Pugh, 2000)

MY LEAD-LEARNERS:

Grace the Grace-filled
Harry the Honest
Aaron the Lightning Rod
Tammy the Innocent
Helena the Great
...Thank you.

There are those of us who must walk fearlessly through life as if to disturb those already in transit. As we journey, we cannot but change one another through both the divine and the temporal, nourishing and tempering us into the reality of life and breath and all that is.

(Pugh, 2000)

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